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S. STEPNIAK

STORIES
FROM GARSHIN



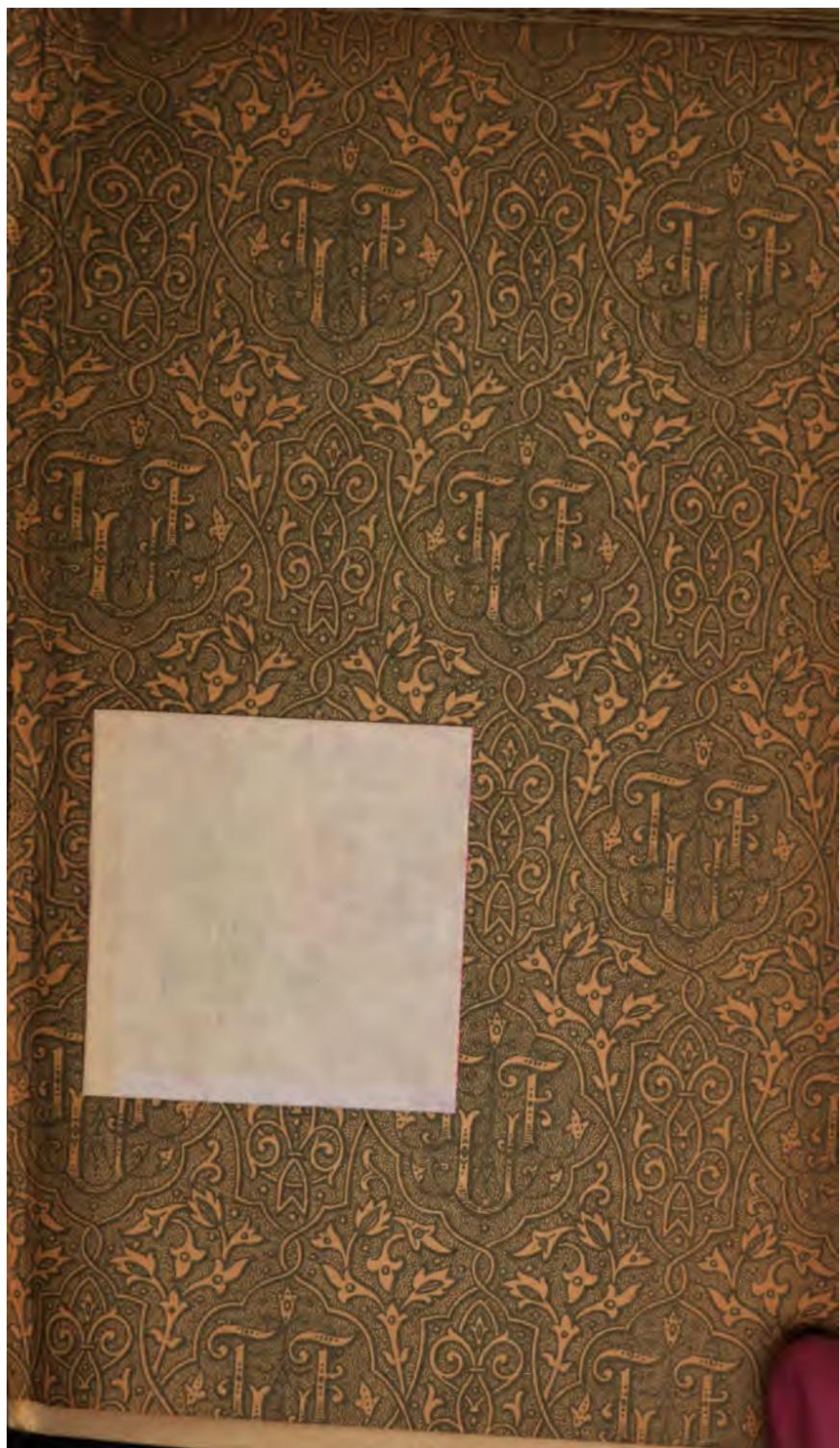
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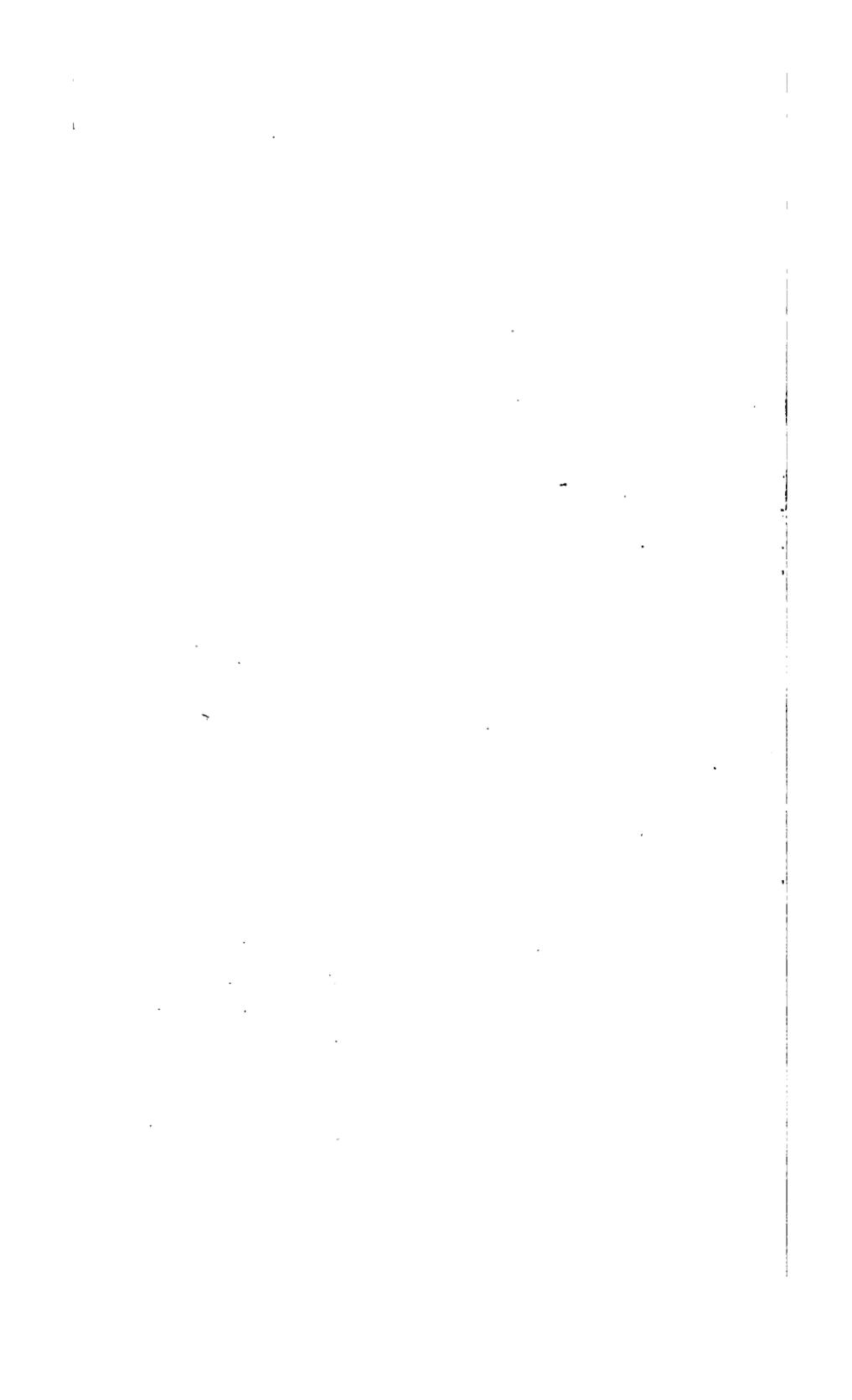


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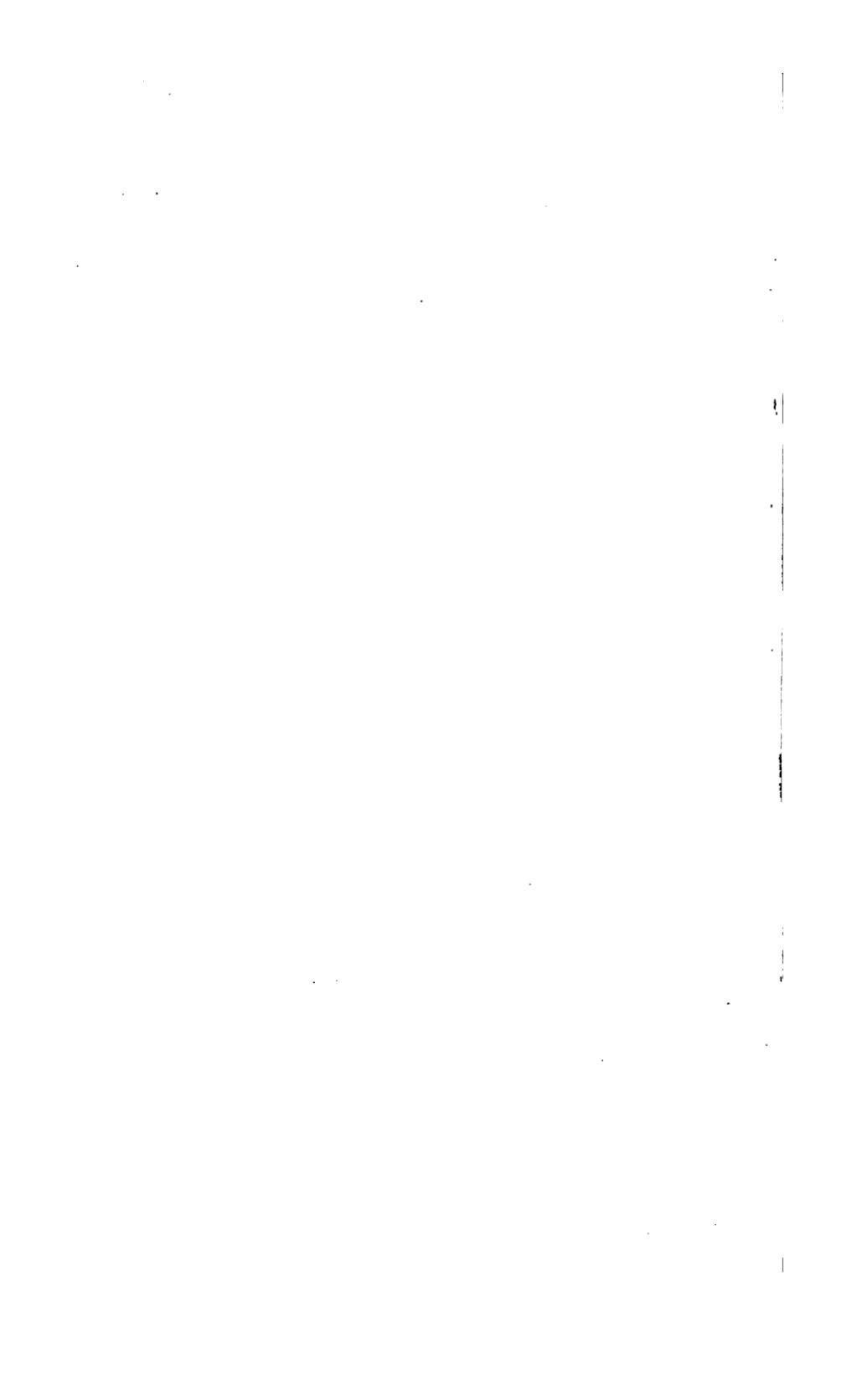
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THE
INDEPENDENT NOVEL
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STORIES FROM GARSHIN



THE
INDEPENDENT NOVEL SERIES

THE SHIFTING OF THE FIRE

A PHANTOM FROM THE EAST

JEAN DE KERDREN

POOR LADY MASSEY

STORIES FROM GARSHIN

V. GARSHIN

**STORIES
FROM
GARSHIN**

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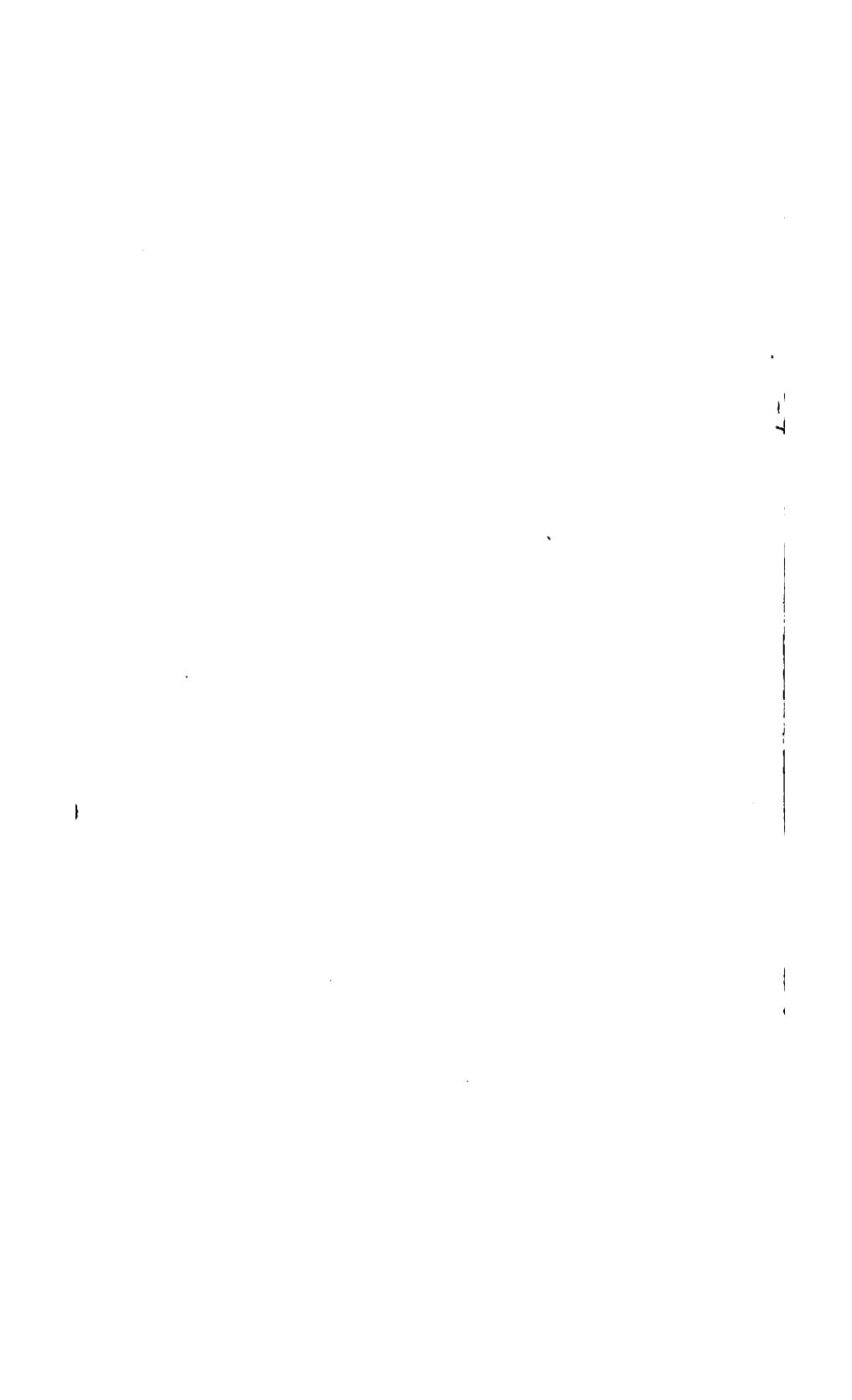
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INTRODUCTION BY

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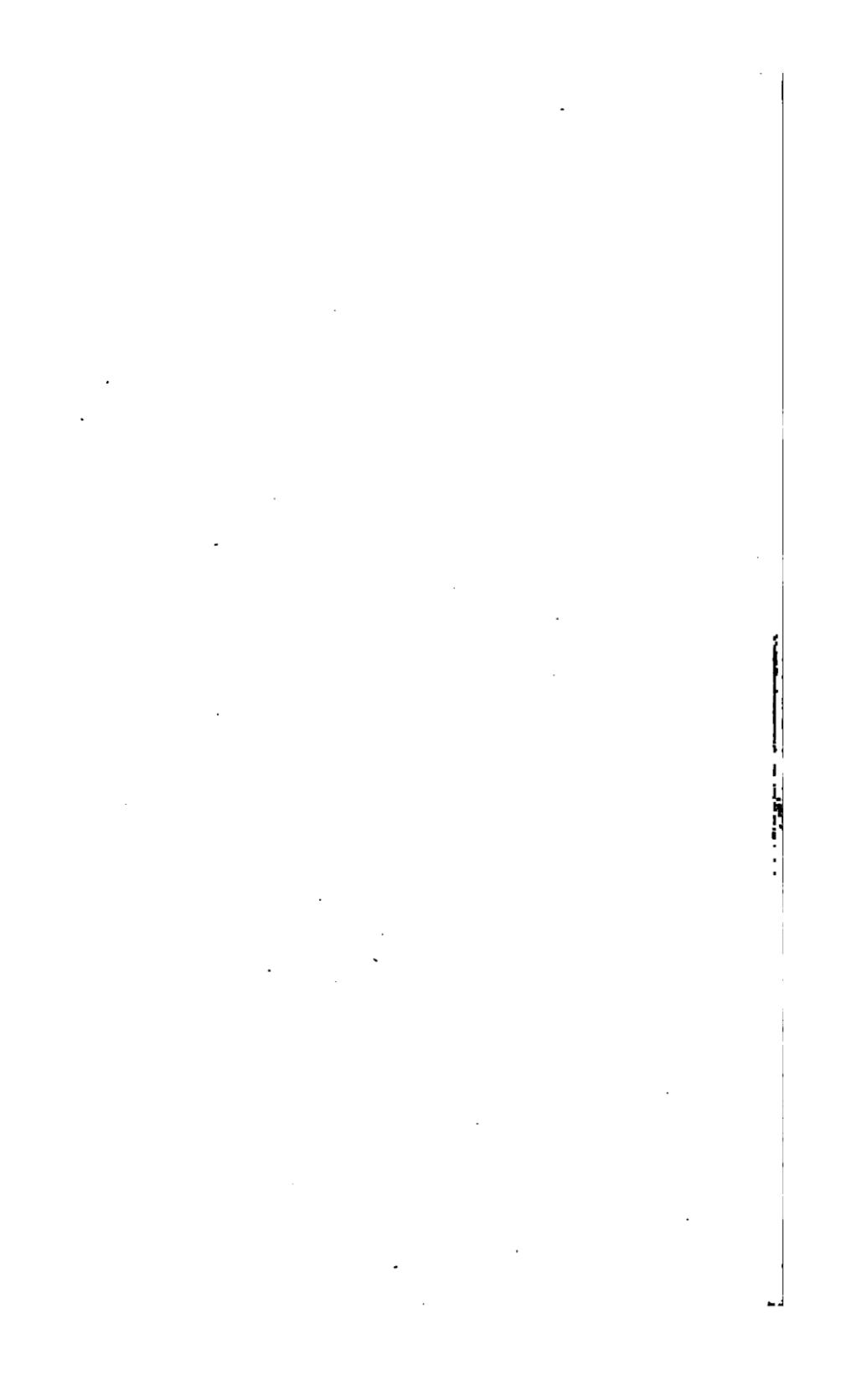
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Stories from Garshin.

INTRODUCTION.

SINCE the two great Russian novelists, Turgenev and Tolstoi, broke the ice of indifference to Russian literature, and won for themselves and for Russian fiction a high place in the world of art, the English are constantly asking who are the successors of these great men, who, even in translation, were able to captivate their intellects and imaginations.

Real successors, able to stand side

A

by side with Tolstoi and Turgenev and not be eclipsed, there are none. Modern Russian fiction can be compared with that of the generation of the forties in Russia.

This falling off in artistic creation, after so glorious a blossoming, is a phenomenon which is in nowise discreditable to Russian genius, for it can be observed not in Russia alone. There is no continuity of progress in the domain of art such as we see in the domain of abstract thought. Whilst in science every new generation invariably marks a new stride in advance, in every branch of art we notice a modest beginning, after which the summit of perfection is reached, to be followed by a period of comparative inefficiency, protracted until a new historical period remoulds the conditions of life, and gives rise to a new

art, which follows the same line of development.

The movement of art may be represented by an undulating line, the summits of the huge waves being divided sometimes by centuries, whilst the smaller waves, forming the surface of the huge ones, are separated by several generations. There has been no successor to Shakespeare or Dante or Homer, who mark the three great periods of European history.

There has been no successor to Gœthe and Schiller in Germany, to Hugo and De Musset in France, or to the great novelists of the past generation, Thackery, Dickens, George Elliot and Walter Scott in England.

Russia has had a similar artistic history, although condensed into the short space of the present century. With Pushkin and Lermontov she

reaches the summit of her poetical growth; with Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoi, Dostoevsky and Goncharov, the summit of her fiction. The generation of the sixties marks its lowest ebb. Among the novelists of that epoch there is not a single one whose works will live.

With the eighties another rising tide is clearly noticeable. It is still at its beginning, and one cannot help thinking that the terrible political crisis, through which the country is passing, has much to do with checking its full manifestations. When the flower of a generation is ruthlessly decimated, the best, the most ardent spirits, finding an early grave in the mines of Siberia, or in the gloomy subterranean cells of the fortresses, there is little scope for the development of national genius.

Yet the last generation of Russian

novelists has undoubtedly produced men whose works show traces of superior, unperishable talent, emulating, sometimes, those of the great masters.

Among these modern authors, none deserves closer attention, or is more worth careful study, than Vsevolod Garshin, whom adverse fate alone prevented from reaching the summit of art. He died in 1888, at the age of thirty-two, killed, not by the brutal force of Russian despotism, but by the moral suffering resulting from the conditions which this despotism has created. None of our great masters created, at Garshin's age, anything better than his work, and none can stand as so true and painfully effective a representative of the spirit of our troubled time.

Garshin wrote nothing but prose. But he was far more a poet than a

novelist. Like the greatest of our lyric writers, Lermontov, towards whom he felt such an organic attraction, Garshin gives in his works a vast amount of crystallised feeling and emotion with comparatively little of the plastic elements of poetry—those which appeal to all times and all nations. He felt too strongly the woes and sorrows of his own epoch to be able to give to his creations that completeness which would make them live of themselves. But for his contemporaries this is rather an additional charm than a drawback. Most of his sketches are but lyric poems, whose artistic merit and interest lies in their opening the very heart of the author himself. For his heart was that of the Russian humanity of his epoch, intoxicated with bright social ideals of the future, burning

with devotions, love and pity for all the disheartened and unfortunate, yet diffident of itself, humbled and sad, often crushed by the consciousness of its helplessness in face of such overwhelming evils—the noblest and most unfortunate heart that ever beat in man's breast.

Two periods are to be distinguished in the literary career of Vsevolod Garshin. The first is closely connected with his military career, and some of his best works of this period are the reproduction of his own military experiences during the Turkish war of 1877, in which he took part as a volunteer.

The motives which impelled this most kind-hearted of men to embrace the profession of arms are very characteristic of him, and of the class to which he belonged. The thirst for 'heroic exploits,'

the 'glory of Russia's arms,' were, for him, words with a rather ugly meaning. But when war broke out and the newspapers reported the daily slaughter of Russian soldiers upon the battlefield, and their unspeakable miseries in the camps and hospitals, Garshin felt impelled to go and share the sufferings of his people.

The admirable sketch, bearing the rather misleading title, *A Coward*, describes his own feelings at that period, and also gives us the moral physiognomy of those generous and devoted young Russian men and women, whose motto is: 'Everything for the People.'

A Coward was written after Garshin's return from the campaign; his first literary production, *Four Days on the Battlefield*, was written almost from the battlefield itself, and has for its basis an actual fact.

It is the story of an educated man who has enlisted in the army upon high humanitarian grounds. During his first action he kills a Turk, and, a minute later, is himself stretched upon the ground by a ball that hits him in the leg. He loses consciousness, and is left upon the battlefield among the corpses. Then follows the wounded man's diary—describing his sufferings, his struggle with death (which he staves off, thanks to the water he finds in the flask of the Turk whom he has killed); and the ghastly sight of the corpse by his side, rapidly decomposing under the hot sun. The whole is a picture of war divested of its glamour. The absence of sermonising or moralising makes it only the more impressive and convincing.

This sketch has been twice translated into English. It has therefore

not been incorporated into the present volume.

Those English readers whose opinion I have had the opportunity of hearing, find *Four Days* horrible, and even 'ghastly.' But to Russians it is only truthful; like the war pictures of Vereshchagin, mercilessly truthful, yet simple; not seeking to pile up horrors, but not avoiding them in order to spare the feelings of the public.

Later on Garshin wrote another longer sketch, *The Recollections of Private Ivanov*, which reproduces more fully his soldier life.

The *Recollections*, which the reader will find in the present volume, is one of the best of Garshin's stories; yet it reveals at the same time the immaturity of his talent, and that truly Oriental incapacity of some Russians

to realise that love and sympathy are not everything, and that the ideas of honour and human dignity must also have some room in the making of human character.

The figure of Captain Wentzel, who may in a sense be called the hero of the *Recollections*, is not merely unreal, but shocking, from an artistic as well as from a human point of view.

To idealise such a brute, and make allowances for him on account of his 'hidden sympathy' with the soldiers whom he so brutally maltreats, is the same as to idealise an executioner or slave-driver who would torture children and prostitute women in the name of some 'idea' which has entered into his wooden head.

But the *Recollections* need not be viewed as a story. They present a

series of scenes from military life, loosely connected by a very thin plot, which one almost forgets in the striking effectiveness of separate war pictures in this collection. After those of Count Tolstoi they are the best of their kind in our literature. They have that plasticity, fulness of detail, breadth, and objective calmness, which we do not find in Garshin's other works.

It is interesting to note that this most objective of Garshin's stories was written, one may say, in view of one of the greatest physical calamities that has occurred upon Russian soil.

The Kukuev railway catastrophe happened a few miles from the country place where Garshin was staying when writing the *Recollections*. He went to the place of the disaster and saw all its ghastly details, and yet he was

able to preserve calmness enough to complete his story.

His sensitiveness was not the result of weakness of nerves. In one of his letters, written from Bulgaria to an intimate friend, he says that he was himself surprised at his calmness at the sight of slaughter and horrible mutilation. What destroyed his peace of mind, deprived him of sleep, and made life unendurable to him, was the sight of a moral evil, injustice appealing to men's moral sense, and demanding their interference.

Now, this was precisely what he had to live through during the nine years which followed his return from the war.

That was the epoch when Russian revolt broke out, attempt following attempt in rapid succession, resulting in executions, wholesale arrests, and fierce sentences worse than executions.

Many of those who perished were Garshin's dear and beloved friends. He did not approve of their methods. But what other way could he advise them to take in fighting the dark power stifling the life of the whole country? If they were wrong, were not those ten thousand times more wrong who watched the desperate struggle without moving a finger, lest they should compromise themselves? And who among these outsiders could say that he had done enough to exculpate himself from the charge of indifference?

These are questions which every Russian of sensitive conscience was asking himself in the troubled times of internecine war. For a man so loving, so generous to others, and so severe to himself, the trial proved too hard. In a few years he was literally consumed by it, body and soul.

It is not to be wondered at that Garshin's works belonging to this second period of his literary career bear the stamp of the author's gloomy mood. We have rather to wonder at the extent to which he succeeded in restraining himself, and in avoiding the intrusion of his personality upon the reader.

His stories of that period are subjective, lyrical. But it is the true, the artistic lyricism of Lermontov, to whom he may be compared in nervous, impassioned style, poetic language, and wonderful capacity of saying so much in a few pages, almost in a few lines. The subjective stories of this period are far superior, artistically, to the more objective military sketches of his earlier period. Some of them are perfect masterpieces of their kind. This can be said of most of his fairy tales—

a peculiarly difficult form of writing, in which he has no rival throughout the whole of Russian literature. They can be compared only with the few gems of this kind which Tourgener set in his *Prose Poems*. They are melancholy ; but here the gloom is relieved, as with a ray of sunshine, by the bright and simple life of nature, of all those trees, flowers, birds, insects and animals, which Garshin, as a true poet, loves and reproduces with such quaint and delicate humour.

When from nature he turns to man's life, the gloom becomes denser, and there is no sunshine to relieve it.

Such is one of the most powerful of Garshin's stories, *Night* — the last night of a suicide, a weak, kind-hearted, not particularly courageous creature, who is driven to put an end to his miserable days by his utter

incapacity to find an issue out of the lies and contradictions of the world. Or another—the most concrete, the best finished, and the gloomiest of the series — *An Occurrence*, telling the heart-rending story of the love of a simple, good-natured man — a petty official — for a street girl, who has been well brought up, and is honest and pure in heart notwithstanding her life of degradation, who suffers horribly but cannot accept the redeeming hand held out to her, because she does not love him, and feels that to consent to marry him would be another and perhaps worse desecration of herself.

Neither the little story *Night* nor any of the fairy tales have entered into the present volume for want of space. But let us hope that another volume of Garshin will appear, to give to English readers a full idea of

this subtle, poetic, merciless, yet irresistibly sympathetic author.

The year 1880 was a fatal one in Garshin's life. The burden of grief, harboured in his sensitive soul, proved too great for him, and he broke down.

The Winter Palace explosion occurred in February. Count Loris Melikov was appointed virtual Dictator, and a few days later a young revolutionist, Mlodetzki, attempted his life. He was immediately apprehended and condemned to death, and lay in prison awaiting his execution on the morrow.

Garshin was in St Petersburg, and spent that night at his house in a mental agony, assuredly more dreadful than that of the brave young condemned. In the early dawn he left the house, impelled by one absorbing idea, that of seeing the Dictator, im-

ploring him to spare the man who had attempted his life, and inaugurating a policy of pacification. He overcame all obstacles, and was admitted to the house. Count Loris Melikov was awakened and gave him a long audience. With the eloquence of passion and despair, Garshin urged his request. But the supplications of the young humanitarian were met by considerations of the iron 'necessity of State.' The Count treated him very kindly, and Garshin always retained a good memory of Loris Melikov. But the interview did not restore his peace of mind.

Mlodetzki was executed, and Garshin hurriedly left the capital. In Moscow he obtained, by very strange means, an interview with another high official, whom he also tried to convert to his views. Then he left Moscow,

roamed all over Russia, and saw Count Tolstoi. A few weeks later he was discovered by his relatives, in a distant corner of Russia, in a state of melancholy insanity.

He recovered for the time being, and wrote his *Scarlet Flower*, a story of a madman. This was his last and finest work, and would have done honour to Turgenev. It is a work of surpassing beauty, uniting in a wonderful way the subtle psychology, the all-pervading poetry, of which he alone, among modern Russian writers, possessed the secret, with the plasticity and objectiveness of his early period.

Dr Sikorsky, a well-known Russian specialist in mental diseases, wrote in a medical journal a very interesting notice upon this work, pronouncing it to be a strikingly faithful study of maniacal insanity. This is quite credi-

ble, and is a high testimony to such a work. But it is no test of artistic merit. With all its scientific faithfulness, the sketch might be worthless as a work of art. If the *Scarlet Flower* is not merely a remarkable, but a great work, this is because it gives us a powerfully vivid picture of a madman, a creature apart, who is, at the same time, a man like everyone of us.

To me it seems evident that the hero of this story is, if not a 'Nihilist, certainly a man whose mania is of a political kind. In creating this weird and absorbing story, Garshin shows that, whilst the reasoning capacities of the sick man are impaired, his feelings and moral impulses—his moral man—are perfectly sane. We see the true man behind the distorted face of the maniac, and we recognise in him a perfect type, embodying one of the

most interesting phases of human psychology.

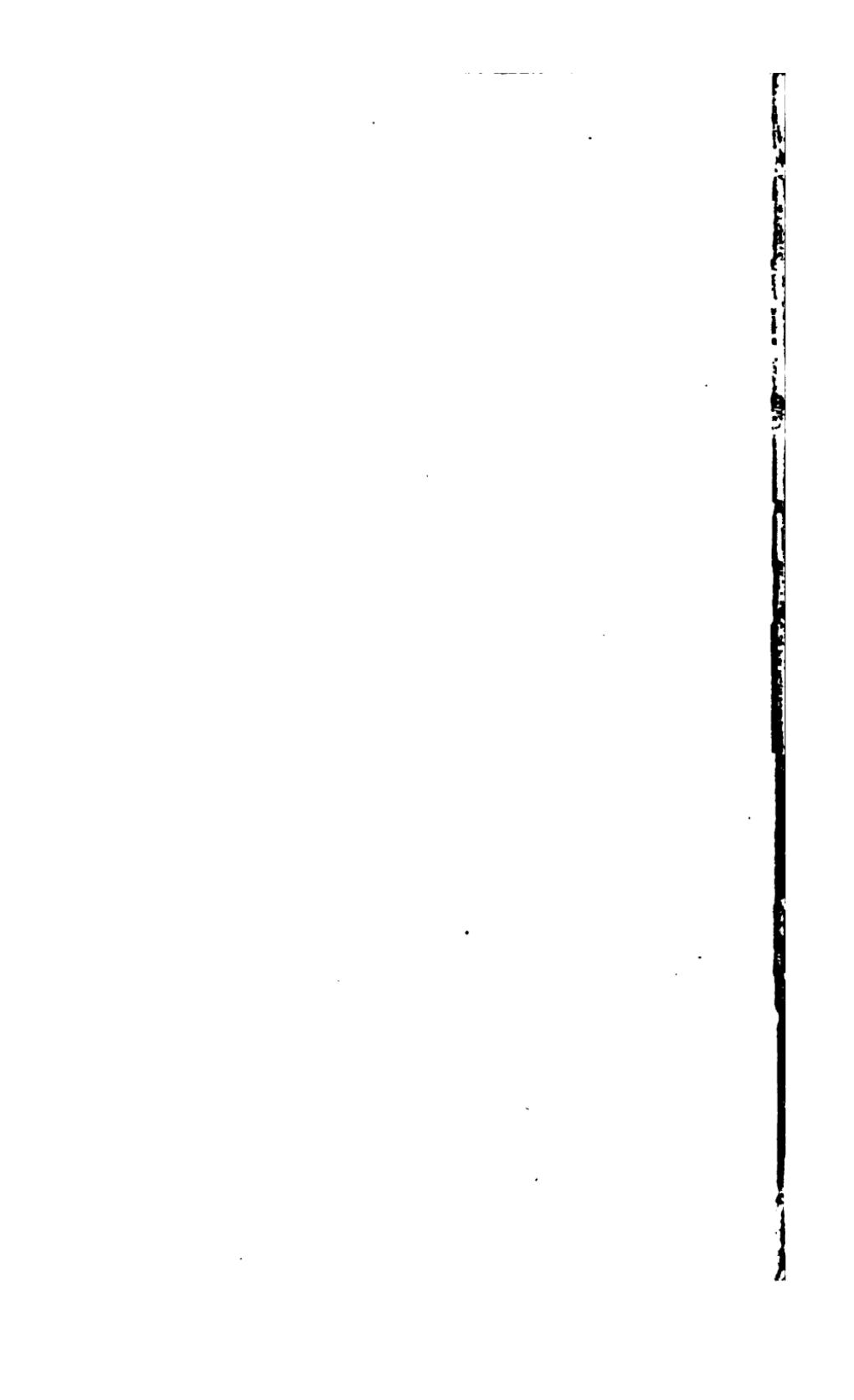
The *Scarlet Flower* was Garshin's 'Swan-song.'

His fatal disease returned, and in one of its attacks he threw himself from the fourth storey of the house upon the stone staircase floor. He lingered for a few days, and died.

S. STEPNIAK.



THE SCARLET FLOWER





THE SCARLET FLOWER

(In memory of I. S. Turgenev).

I.

LN the name of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor Peter I., I declare this lunatic asylum open to inspection.'

These words were uttered in a loud resonant voice. The asylum clerk, who was entering the patient's name in a large ragged book on an inky table, could not refrain from smiling. But the two young men in charge of the patient did not smile; they could hardly stand on their feet, so exhausted were they after two days and nights spent without sleep, alone with the madman, whom they had just brought by train. At the last station but one his fury had increased; they had managed to obtain a strait-jacket, and, with the help of a gendarme and the railway officials, had put it on the patient. In this condition they had

brought him to the town and presented him at the hospital.

He was terrible. Over his grey coat, which he had torn to ribbons during his fit of fury, was fastened the coarse sacking strait-jacket, cut low at the neck, with its long-sleeves tied behind, and binding his arms across his chest. His inflamed, widely-distended eyes (he had not slept for ten days) burned with a fixed, fiery glare; the corners of his under lip twitched with a nervous convulsion; the curly, tangled hair had fallen over his forehead like a mane; and he tramped up and down the entry office with quick, heavy steps, curiously examining the old cases full of documents and the leather-covered chairs, and glancing now and then at his escort.

‘Take him into the ward to the right.’

‘I know, I know. I was here with you last year. We inspected the asylum. I know everything; it will be difficult to deceive me!’ said the patient.

He turned towards the door. The hall-porter opened it for him, and, with his quick, heavy, resolute gait, he walked out of the office, holding his frenzied head erect and high, and hurried, almost at a run, down the right-hand corridor into the lunatic ward. The attendants could hardly keep pace with him.

'Ring. I can't; you've tied my hands.'

The porter opened the door, and the new arrival entered the asylum.

It was a large stone building of the old-fashioned state-barrack type. Two large halls—the dining-hall and a general living-room for quiet patients, a wide corridor with a glass door leading to the gardens and flower-beds, and about a score of separate rooms in which the patients lived—occupied the ground floor. There were on this floor also two dark rooms—one lined with mattrasses, the other with boards, and a huge gloomy, vaulted bath-room. The upper floor was occupied by the women. A confused noise, broken by shrieks and howls, came from that quarter. The asylum was built to accommodate eighty persons; but, as it served for several provinces, up to three hundred patients were crowded into it, Four or five beds were placed in each little cell; and during the winter, when the patients were not allowed out into the garden, and all the iron-grated windows were fast shut, the air became intolerably close.

The new patient was taken into the bath-room. Even on a healthy person that room would have produced a dismal impression, and on his excited, over-strung imagination the impression was morbidly vivid. It was a great, vaulted room, with a clammy

stone floor, and was lighted by a single window in a corner ; the walls and vaulted roof were painted dark red ; two stone baths, like two oval pits filled with water, were sunk in the floor (which was black with dirt), with their rims on a level with it. A huge brass stove, with a cylindrical cauldron to heat the water, and a complete array of brass pipes and taps filled up the corner opposite the window. The whole place wore an appearance which seemed to a morbid imagination unusually gloomy and fantastic ; and the dismal face of the bath-keeper, a fat, taciturn Oukrainian, still further strengthened the impression.

Thus, when the patient was taken into this terrible room to have a bath, and, in accordance with the system of treatment adopted by the head doctor of the asylum, a large blister was placed on the back of his neck, he was seized with horror and fury. Absurd fancies, one more monstrous than another, crowded through his brain. What was this ? The inquisition ? Some place of secret execution, where his enemies had resolved to make an end of him. Perhaps, hell itself. At last the idea came into his head that he was to be put to the question.

The attendants undressed him in spite of his desperate resistance. His disease had doubled his muscular strength, and he easily

tore himself from the hands of several keepers, dashing them to the ground ; at last, four of them got him down, and, taking him by the hands and feet, put him into the warm water. It seemed to him boiling, and through the frenzied brain flashed a fragmentary, incoherent thought of torture by scalding water and red-hot iron. Choking, and convulsively beating the water with hands and feet (as far as the firm hold of the keepers allowed), he shrieked out in strangled tones an incoherent speech, such as no one could imagine without hearing it. Prayers and curses were jumbled together in it. He shrieked and shouted until he was exhausted ; and then, with bitter tears, softly murmured a sentence in no way connected with the former one :—

‘Blessed martyr, holy St George. Into thy hands I give my body. But my spirit—no, oh no !’

The keepers still held him, although he had calmed down. The warm bath and an ice-bag placed on his head had produced their effect. But when he was lifted out of the water and seated on a stool to have the blister put on, what remained of his strength and of his frenzied fancies burst out afresh.

‘Why? Why?’ he cried, ‘I have done

no willing wrong to anything. Why should you kill me? Oh—o—oh! Oh God! Oh martyrs tortured before me! Save me, I implore.' . . .

The burning touch of the blister against the back of his neck made him struggle frantically. The attendants could not hold him, and were at a loss what to do.

'There's nothing for it,' remarked the soldier, who was performing the operation; 'we must take it off.'

These simple words made the patient shudder. 'Take it off! Take what off? My head!' he thought, and closed his eyes in deadly terror. The soldier took a coarse towel by the two ends, and drew it quickly and heavily across the back of the patient's neck, scraping off the blister, and with it the outer skin, and leaving a bare, red, grazed place. The pain of this operation, almost unbearable even for a calm and healthy person, seemed to the patient to be the end of everything. He made one frenzied effort, and tore himself from the hands of the keeper, and his naked body dropped on the stone flags. He thought that his head had been cut off. He would have cried out, but could not. He was carried to his pallet in a fainting fit, which gradually passed into a long, profound, dead sleep.



III.

HE awoke in the night. All was still ; he could hear the breathing of the sleeping patients from the neighbouring large room. Somewhere in the distance someone, who had been placed in the dark room, was talking to himself in a strange, monotonous voice, and in the women's department overhead a hoarse contralto was singing some wild song. The patient listened to these sounds. He felt a terrible exhaustion and weakness throughout all his body ; his neck was very painful.

‘Where am I ? What has happened ?’ he thought. Then suddenly the last month came up before his mind’s eye with extraordinary vividness, and he realised that he was ill, and of what disease. He remembered a whole series of absurd ideas, words and actions, and the thought of them made his whole being shudder. ‘But that is over—

thank God, all that is over ! ' he whispered, and fell asleep again.

The open, iron-grated window looked out into a little space between the huge buildings and the stone outer wall ; no one ever entered this space, and it was thickly overgrown with lilac and some kind of wild bushes. The lilac was magnificent just then, in full flower. Beyond the bushes, straight opposite the window, was the dark, high wall ; here and there peeped over it the tall tree tops of the great garden, flooded with the moonlight that streamed through them. To the right was the white asylum building, with iron-grated windows lighted from within ; to the left the blank white wall of the mortuary shining in the moonlight. The moonbeams streamed through the window-grating on to the floor of the room, and lighted up part of the bed and the white, worn face of the patient, with its closed eyes ; there was nothing mad about his appearance now. He slept the deep heavy sleep of an exhausted man, dreamless, motionless, and almost breathless. For a few seconds he had awaked in full possession of his senses, like a sane man ; but only to rise next morning as mad as before.



III.

‘**H**OW are you?’ asked the doctor next morning.

The patient, who had just awaked, was still lying under the coverlet.

‘Perfectly well,’ he answered, jumping up, putting on his slippers and snatching up his dressing-gown. ‘Capital—only for this.’

He touched the back of his neck.

‘I can’t move my neck without pain. But that doesn’t matter. Everything’s all right if one understands it, and I understand.’

‘Do you know where you are?’

‘Of course, doctor! I’m in the madhouse. But you know, if one understands it, that’s of not the slightest consequence. Not the slightest!’

The doctor looked fixedly into his patient’s eyes, and his handsome, delicate face, with its exquisitely-kept golden beard and calm blue eyes, looking out through gold-rimmed spec-

tacles, was immovable and inscrutable. He was observing.

'Why do you look at me so fixedly? You can't read what is in my heart,' continued the patient; 'but I can read yours plainly! Why do you do evil? Why have you collected this crowd of unfortunate people, and why do you keep them here? For me it is a matter of indifference. I understand all, and am calm; but they? What is the use of this misery? To a man who has attained to having in his mind a great thought, a *general* thought, it is all one where he lives or what he feels. Is not that so?'

'Possibly,' answered the doctor, sitting down at the table in a corner of the room in order to get a good view of the patient, who walked hurriedly up and down, shuffling in his huge horse-leather slippers, and waving the tails of his large-flowered cotton dressing-gown with broad red stripes. The assistant and superintendent, who accompanied the doctor, stood stiffly by the door.

'And I have it!' exclaimed the patient. 'When I found it, I felt that I was born anew. My senses have grown keener, my brain works as it has never done before. What formerly had to be reached by the long road of conjectures and mental conclusions I now comprehend intuitively. I have attained

to the actuality of what philosophy has worked out. I live through, in my own self, the great idea that time and space are fictions. I live in all ages. I live without space, everywhere, or nowhere, as you please ; and therefore it is all one to me whether you keep me here or let me go free—whether I am tied or at liberty. I have remarked that there are a few more such persons here. But for all the crowd of others, it is a dreadful position. Why do you not set them free ? Who needs—'

' You said,' interrupted the doctor, ' that you live without time and space. Nevertheless you cannot deny that we are in this room and that it is now'—the doctor pulled out his watch—' half-past ten o'clock on May 6th, 18—. What do you think about this ? '

' Nothing. It is all the same to me where and when I live ; and if it is all the same to *me*, does not that mean that *I* am always and everywhere ? '

The doctor laughed.

' Out - of - the - way logic ! ' he said, rising. ' Maybe you're right. Good-bye. Will you have a cigar ? '

' Thank you.' He stopped, took a cigar, and nervously bit off its end. ' That helps one to think,' he said. ' That's the world—a microcosm. At one end is alkali, at the other,

acid. That is the balance of the world, too, in which opposing elements neutralise one another. Good-day, doctor !'

The doctor went on his way. Most of the patients were standing straight up by their beds to receive him. No personage in authority anywhere is so much looked up to by his subordinates as a lunacy doctor by his maniacs.

The patient, left alone, continued to tramp, with an abrupt gait, up and down his little room. Tea was brought to him ; he tossed off a large mugful in two gulps without sitting down, and swallowed a big piece of bread almost at a mouthful. Then he left the room, and for several hours walked without stopping, with his quick, heavy tread, from end to end of the great building. It was a rainy day, and the patients were not allowed out into the garden. When the doctor's assistant came to look for the new patient he found him at one end of the corridor, where he was standing pressing his face against a pane of the glass garden door and gazing fixedly into the flower-garden. His attention had been attracted by an unusually brilliant scarlet flower, a certain variety of poppy.

‘Come and be weighed, please,’ said the assistant, touching him on the shoulder.

When the patient turned round facing him the assistant almost started back with fright ; such savage hatred and anger were in the wild eyes. On seeing the assistant, however, he assumed a quite different expression of face, and followed obediently, without speaking a word. He appeared to be absorbed in profound thought. They went into the doctor's study ; the patient of his own accord placed himself on the platform of the little weighing machine, and the assistant, after weighing him, wrote down against his name in the book : 109 lbs. On the next day he weighed 107 lbs. ; on the next after that 106 lbs.

' If he goes on this way he won't live,' said the doctor, and gave orders that he should have the most nourishing food possible.

But, notwithstanding both this and the extraordinary appetite of the patient, he grew thinner with every day, and every day the assistant wrote under his name a smaller and smaller number of pounds. He hardly slept at all, and passed whole days in ceaseless motion.





I V.

HE realised that he was in a mad-house ; he realised even that he was ill. Sometimes, as during the first night, he would awake in the silence, after a whole day of frantic movement, with an aching in all his limbs, and a feeling of terrible weight in his head, but in full possession of his senses. Possibly this was caused by the absence of impressions in the twilight and stillness of the night ; perhaps by the languid way in which the brain of a man just awaked works ; but at such moments he clearly understood his position, and was, as it were, sane. But day soon returned, and with the light and the awakening of life in the asylum, the wave of impressions would sweep him away again ; the diseased brain was unable to cope with them, and he was mad anew. His condition of mind was a strange tangle of logical thinking and absurdities. He understood that the

people around him were all mad, yet, at the same time, he saw in each of them some person hidden or disguised whom he had known before, or of whom he had read or heard. The asylum was peopled by men of all times and all lands. There were among them both living and dead men ; famous and powerful personages, and soldiers killed in the last war and risen from the dead. He saw himself in some magic, enchanted circle, into which were gathered all the powers of the earth, and haughtily regarded himself as the centre of that circle. All his fellow patients had assembled here in order to carry out a work which he vaguely imagined as a gigantic undertaking intended to destroy evil in the world. He did not know in what this work was to consist, but felt within himself strength sufficient for its accomplishment. He was able to read the thoughts of others ; to see in things their whole history ; the great elms in the asylum garden told him long legends of their past ; the building itself, which indeed was rather old, he believed to have been erected by Peter the Great, and was convinced that that emperor had lived in it at the time of the battle of Poltava. He read this on the walls, on the crumbling stucco, on the bits of broken bricks and tiles which he found in the garden ; the whole history of the house

and garden was written upon them. He peopled the little mortuary building with scores and hundreds of long-dead men, and would gaze fixedly at the window which looked from its basement into a corner of the garden, seeing in the broken reflection of lights on the old, dirty, iridescent glass familiar figures which he had seen at some time in life or in portraits.

Meanwhile beautifully fine weather began, and the patients spent whole days in the open air. In their division of the garden, small and thickly planted with trees, flowers were set in every spot where there was room for them. The superintendent made those of the patients who were fit for any labour at all, work in the garden, and the whole day long they swept and gravelled the paths, weeded and watered the beds of flowers, cucumbers and melons, which they had dug and planted. One corner of the garden was filled with a dense growth of cherry-trees; the whole length of the garden ran an avenue of elms; and in the middle, on a small artificial hillock, was the finest flower-bed in the whole garden. Bright-coloured flowers grew round the edges of the raised bed, and the middle was occupied by a great large-blossomed dahlia of a rare variety, yellow, with red spots. This dahlia formed the

centre-piece of the whole garden, standing up taller than the other flowers, and it might have been observed that many of the patients ascribed to it some mysterious significance. To the new patient also it appeared to be something out of the common—a kind of palladium of the garden and building. All the paths had been bordered by the hands of patients. The edgings were formed of all those flowers which can be met with in Ukrainian gardens—tall hollyhocks, bright petunias, clumps of tall tobacco with small pinkish blossoms, mint, marigolds, nasturtiums and poppies. Not far from the front door grew three clumps of a peculiar variety of poppy; the blossoms were much smaller than those of the ordinary kind, and differed from them also by the remarkable brilliance of their scarlet colour. This was the flower which had startled the patient when he looked through the glass door into the garden on the day after his arrival.

On going into the garden for the first time, he at once, before leaving the door-step, looked towards these brilliant flowers. There were only two of them; the plants had happened to grow up a little apart from the other flowers, and in a spot which was left unweeded, so that they were surrounded by thick goose-foot and other coarse weeds.

The patients came out, one after another ; the keeper, standing at the door, gave to each of them a thick, white knitted cotton cap with a red cross on the forehead. The caps had come back from the war, and had been bought at an auction. But our patient, as might have been expected, ascribed to the red crosses a peculiar, mystic significance. He took off his cap and looked first at the cross, then at the poppy-flowers. The flowers were brighter coloured than the cross.

'It wins,' said the patient; 'but we shall see.'

He left the door-step. Glancing round, but not seeing the keeper, who was behind him, he stepped across the bed and stretched out his hand to the blossom, but could not make up his mind to pick it. He felt a burning and pricking sensation, first in the outstretched hand, then through all his body, as though some strong current of a force unknown to him flowed from the red petals and penetrated through his whole frame. He drew nearer and touched the blossom with his hand, but he fancied that it defended itself by throwing out a poisonous, deadly vapour. His head swam ; he made a last, desperate effort, and seized the stem. Suddenly a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder. It was the keeper's.

'You must not pick it,' said the old Ou-

krainian. 'And don't walk on the bed. There are a lot of you mad folk here; let each of you take a flower, and you'd pretty soon spoil the garden,' he added, convincingly, still keeping his hold upon the patient's shoulder.

The patient looked him in the face, silently freed his hand, and walked, in deep agitation, down the path. 'Oh, unhappy men,' he thought; 'you do not see—you are so blinded that you defend it! But, come what may, I will put an end to it. If not to-day, then to-morrow we will measure our strength. And if I perish, what does it matter?'

He walked about the garden till evening, forming acquaintances and carrying on with the other patients strange conversations, in which each speaker heard only answers to his own insane thoughts, expressed in senselessly mysterious language. He walked, now with one fellow-patient, now with another, and by evening had made up his mind that 'all is ready,' as he said to himself. Soon, soon these iron gratings would fall asunder, all these trampled human beings would go forth from here to the ends of the earth, and all the world would start into movement, fling off its ancient trammels and appear in new and glorious beauty. He had almost forgotten the flower; but, coming in from the

garden and mounting the doorsteps, he again caught sight of the blossoms shining like two red coals in the twilight among the thick and already dewy weeds. He lagged a little behind the crowd, and, getting behind the keeper's back, waited for a favourable moment. No one saw him jump across the bed, snatch a blossom, and hurriedly thrust it into his breast under his shirt. When the fresh, dewy petals touched his body he grew as white as death, and his eyes dilated with horror. Cold sweat broke out upon his forehead.

The lamps were lighted in the hospital. While awaiting supper most of the patients lay down on their beds; a few restless ones walked hurriedly up and down the rooms and corridors. The patient with the flower was among these. He walked with his arms folded and convulsively pressed to his breast, as though he wished to crush and smash to pieces the flower hidden there. Whenever he met anyone in walking, he shrank away in order that his clothing might not brush against them. 'Don't come near me! Don't come near me!' he cried. But in the asylum little notice was taken of such exclamations. He walked faster and faster, with longer and longer steps; he walked with a kind of fury, —an hour—two hours.

'I'll wear you out! I'll stifle you!' he muttered savagely. At moments he ground his teeth.

Supper was served in the dining-hall. Several painted and gilded wooden bowls of thin wheat-porridge were placed on each of the large, bare tables. The patients sat down on benches, and each was given a slice of black bread. They ate with wooden spoons, seven or eight persons from each bowl. Some patients, who had been ordered better food, were served separately. Our patient hastily swallowed the ration brought into his room by the keeper, and then, not content with that, went into the dining-hall.

'Allow me to sit down here,' he said to the superintendent.

'Haven't you had your supper?' asked the superintendent, who was filling up the bowls again.

'I am very hungry, and I need a lot of nourishment. All my strength depends on food—you know, I don't sleep at all.'

'Certainly, have some more if you like. Taras, give him a spoon and some bread.'

He sat down before one of the bowls and ate an enormous quantity of porridge.

'There, that'll do, that'll do,' said the superintendent at last, when everyone else

had finished supper and our patient still sat before the bowl, spooning out porridge with one hand and holding the other tightly clenched on his breast. 'You'll make yourself ill.'

'Oh, if you knew how much strength I need — how much strength! Good-bye, Nikolai Nikolatch!' said the patient, rising from the table and firmly pressing the superintendent's hand. 'Good-bye.'

'Where are you going?' asked the superintendent, with a smile.

'I? Nowhere. I shall stay. But perhaps we sha'n't see one another to-morrow. Thank you for your kindness.'

He once more pressed the superintendent's hand firmly. His voice trembled and tears came into his eyes.

'There, there! Don't upset yourself, my dear fellow,' said the superintendent. 'Why do you think such dismal things? You had better go to bed and get to sleep comfortably. You ought to sleep more; if you sleep properly you'll soon get well.'

The patient burst out sobbing. The superintendent turned round to tell the attendants to clear away the supper things. Half-an-hour later everyone in the asylum slept except one man, who lay, dressed, on his bed in a corner room. He was shaking

as if with fever, and convulsively clasped his breast, which seemed to him to be saturated with a deadly poison of unheard-of force.





V.

HE did not sleep at all that night. He had picked the flower because he saw in the action a feat that he was bound to accomplish. At the first glance through the glass door the scarlet petals had attracted his attention, and he believed that in that moment he had found the special thing that he was to accomplish on earth. In this bright red flower was concentrated all the evil of the world. He knew that opium is made from poppies; possibly this idea, exaggerated to monstrous proportions, caused him to create this terrible, fantastic spectre. In his eyes the flower was the incarnation of all evil; it had drawn into itself all the innocent blood that had been shed in the world (that was why it was so red), all the tears, all the bitterness of humanity. It was a mysterious, terrible being, the opposite of

God ; it was Ahriman concealed under a modest and innocent exterior. It must be plucked and killed. But that was not all ; it must not be allowed, in expiring, to discharge its evil into the world. This was the reason that he had put it into his breast. He hoped that by morning the flower would lose its force. Its evil would flow into his breast, into his soul, there to be conquered or to conquer ; if it conquered, it would destroy him, and he would die, but would die as a faithful soldier, as the first champion of humanity, for up till now no one had dared to fight against all the evil of the world at once.

‘They did not see it. I saw it. Can I leave it alive? Rather death than that.’

And he lay, wearing his strength out in a spectral, imaginary warfare, but none the less wearing it out. In the morning the assistant found him half-dead. But notwithstanding that, his excitement soon conquered all fatigue, and he sprang up from his bed, and, as before, ran about the asylum talking to the other patients and to himself more loudly and incoherently than ever. He was not allowed into the garden ; the doctor, seeing that his weight was still decreasing, and that he still did not sleep, and still kept on walking and walking, ordered a large hypodermic injection of morphia. The

patient did not resist ; fortunately his insane ideas at that moment somehow agreed with the operation. He soon fell asleep, the frenzied motion stopped, and the loud tune, which had grown out of the rhythm of his own abrupt footsteps and which constantly accompanied him, left off sounding in his ears. He forgot everything, and did not think even of the second blossom which he had yet to pick.

Nevertheless, he picked it three days later, before the eyes of the old keeper, who was not quick enough to stop him. The keeper ran after him. With a loud scream of triumph the patient fled into the asylum, and, rushing into his room, hid the flower in his breast.

‘What do you pick the flowers for?’ asked the keeper, running in after him. But the patient, who was already lying on his bed in his accustomed attitude with folded arms, began to talk such wild nonsense that the keeper only took off from him in silence the cap with the red cross, which the patient had forgotten in his haste, and went away. Then the spectral struggle began anew. The patient felt evil creeping out of the flower in long sluggish currents, like snakes ; they entangled him in their folds, pressed and crushed his limbs and permeated his body

through and through with their horrible substance. He wept and prayed in the intervals between the curses that he addressed to his enemy. Towards evening the blossom faded. The patient stamped the blackened flower to bits, gathered them up from the floor and carried them into the bath-room. He flung the shapeless lump on to the red-hot coals of the stove, and long stood watching, as his enemy, hissing and squirming, changed at last into a delicate, snow-white, tiny heap of ash. He breathed on it, and it disappeared.

On the following day the patient was worse. Fearfully pale, with haggard cheeks and burning, deeply-sunken eyes, he continued his frenzied pacing up and down, though now with a faltering step and often stumbling, and talked and talked without end.

'I should be sorry to have to use force,' said the head doctor to his assistant.

'But this sort of thing must be stopped somehow. To-day he weighs only 93 lbs. If he goes on this way, he'll die in two days.'

The head doctor meditated.

'Morphia? Chloral?' he said half-inquiring.

'Morphia no longer acted on him yesterday.'

'Tell them to bind him. For that matter, I doubt his recovering.'



V I.

THE patient was bound. He lay on his bed dressed in the strait-jacket, and tightly fastened with broad bands of sacking to the iron bars of the bedstead. But the furious motion increased instead of diminishing. For several hours he struggled obstinately to free himself from his bonds. At last, with a violent effort, he tore one of the bands of sacking, freed his feet, and slipping from under the other bands, began pacing about the room with tied hands, shrieking out wild, incomprehensible phrases.

‘Drat the man !’ cried the keeper, entering the room. ‘It’s really for all the world as if the devils help him. Hritzko ! Ivan ! hurry up there ; he’s untied hisself.’

All three flung themselves upon the patient, and there began a long struggle, exhausting to them, and to him, whose already worn-out

strength was taxed to the uttermost in defending himself—a positive torture. At last they threw him down upon the bed and tied him more firmly than before.

‘You don’t understand what you’re doing !’ cried the patient, gasping for breath. ‘You are ruining everything ! I saw a third . . . just coming out. It’s ready now. . . . Let me finish my work. I must kill it—kill it—kill it ! Then all will be done—all will be saved ! I would send you, but no one can do it—no one but I. You would die of its very touch !’

‘Hush, sir, hush !’ said the old attendant, who had stopped to keep guard by the bedside.

The patient suddenly grew quiet. He had resolved to deceive his keepers. They left him tied the whole day, and did not unfasten his bonds even for the night. After feeding him with his supper, the keeper made up a shake-down for himself beside the bed, and lay down. A moment later he was sound asleep, and the patient set to work.

He bent all his body round until he could touch the iron bar of the bedstead, then, feeling this bar with one hand through the long sleeve of the strait-jacket, began quickly and firmly rubbing the sleeve against

the iron. After some time the thick sacking began to give, and he soon got his first finger free. The work now went more quickly. With an agility and elasticity, altogether incredible to a healthy man, he untied the knots which fastened the sleeves behind him and unlaced the jacket; then, for a long while, lay listening to the snoring of the keeper. The old man was sleeping soundly. The patient took off the jacket and untied himself from the bed. He was free. He tried the door; it was locked from the inside, and the key was probably in the keeper's pocket. The patient dared not search his pockets for fear of waking him, and decided to leave the room by the window.

It was a still, warm, dark night; the window was open; stars shone in the black sky. He looked up at them, recognising the familiar constellations and rejoicing that they, as he fancied, understood and sympathised with him. Half-closing his eyes, he saw innumerable rays which the stars seemed to send down to him, and his insane resolution grew stronger. He had to force aside a strong bar of the iron grating, to squeeze himself through a narrow hole into the little space where the bushes grew, and to climb over a high stone wall. Beyond that wall

would be the last struggle, and after that—no matter if it should be death.

He tried to bend the bar with his hands, but the iron would not yield, so he twisted the strong sleeves of the strait-jacket into a rope, and, throwing this over the iron point of the bar, hung on to it with all his weight. After frantic efforts, which almost exhausted what was left of his strength, the point bent ;—a narrow opening was made. He forced his body through it, grazing his shoulders, elbows and bare knees, made his way through the bushes and stopped before the garden wall. All was still ; the night-lights dimly lit up the windows of the great building ; no one was to be seen in them. No one had noticed him ; the old man on duty by his bedside was, no doubt, still sleeping heavily. The stars shone upon him with tenderly quivering rays, that seemed to penetrate into his very heart.

‘I go to you,’ he whispered, looking up at the sky.

He made an attempt to climb the garden wall, and fell back with torn finger-nails and bleeding hands and knees ; he then felt about for an easier place to climb. Just where this wall joined that of the mortuary, several bricks had fallen out from both walls. Feeling these holes, the patient took advan-

tage of them, climbed on to the top of the garden wall, caught at the boughs of an elm growing on the other side, and let himself gently down by the tree on to the ground.

He rushed to the well-known spot beside the door-steps. The delicate head of the flower, with its folded petals, stood out plainly, dark against the dewy foliage.

‘The last!’ whispered the patient. ‘The last! To-night is victory or death . . . but that is all one to me. Wait!’ he added, looking at the sky, ‘I shall be with you soon.’

He pulled up the plant, tore and crushed it, and, still holding it in his hand, returned to his room by the way that he had left it. The keeper was still asleep. The patient, barely reaching his bed, dropped down on it insensible.

In the morning they found him dead. His face was calm and radiant; the worn features, with the thin lips and deeply sunken closed eyes, had taken a strange look of proud happiness. When he was laid on the trestle they tried to open his hand and take away the scarlet flower. But the hand had stiffened, and he carried his trophy to the grave.

*FROM THE MEMOIRS OF
PRIVATE IVANOV.*





FROM THE MEMOIRS OF PRIVATE
IVANOV, CONCERNING THE
CAMPAIGN OF 1877.

I.

ON May 4th, 1877, I reached Kis-henev, and half-an-hour after my arrival learned that the 56th division of the line was passing through the town. As I had come on purpose to enter some regiment and take part in the war, on May 7th by four o'clock in the morning I was already standing in the street in one of the grey rows that were drawn up before the quarters of the colonel in command of the 222d Starobyelsky infantry regiment. I wore the grey soldier's cloak, with red shoulder-straps and blue loops, the blue-banded cap, and carried the knapsack on my back, the cartridge-bag on my shoulder, the heavy rifle in my hand.

The military band began to play; the standards were carried out from the colonel's quarters. The word of command was given; the regiment silently advanced arms. Then there was a tremendous shout; the colonel first gave the word of command, and after him the commanders of the battalions and companies, and the non-commissioned officers of the platoons. The result of all this was a confused and, for me, utterly incomprehensible movement of the grey cloaks, which ended in the regiment forming into a long column, and moving evenly forwards to the sound of the military band, which had struck up a spirited march. I moved with the rest, trying to keep step and march evenly with my next neighbour. The knapsack dragged backwards, the heavy bags forwards; the rifle kept slipping from my shoulder; the collar of the grey cloak scrubbed against my neck; but in spite of all these little unpleasantnesses, the music, the steady even movement of the column, the fresh early morning, the sight of the bristling bayonets, and stern, sunburnt faces induced a calm and steadfast mood of mind.

At the gates of the houses, notwithstanding the early hour, stood crowds of people; half-dressed figures looked from the windows. We marched down a long, straight street,

past the bazaar, to which the Moldavians were already driving in their carts, drawn by oxen ; the road began to mount uphill and passed by the town cemetery. The morning was dull, cold, and drizzly ; the cemetery trees loomed through the mist ; the tops of the gravestones peered from behind the wet walls and gates. We passed by the cemetery, leaving it to the right of us. I had a fancy that it looked at us through the fog in bewilderment : 'Why should all you thousands go hundreds of miles away to die in strange places when you can die here quietly and lie under my stone slabs and wooden crosses ? Stay !'

But we did not stay. We were drawn on by an inscrutable, secret force ; there is none greater in human life. Each one of us separately would have gone home, but the whole mass went on, driven, not by discipline, not by any sense of the righteousness of his cause, not by any feeling of hatred towards the unknown enemy, not by the fear of punishment, but by that unknown and unconscious something that will long yet lead humanity into bloody carnage—the greatest cause of all human miseries and troubles.

Beyond the cemetery opened out a deep, wide valley, half hidden in the mist. The rain became heavier ; here and there in the

far distance the clouds would part and let a sunbeam through ; at such moments the straight or slanting bands of rain glittered like silver. Mists were creeping along the green slopes of the valley ; through them we could distinguish the long, stretched-out columns of troops marching in front of us. Here and there we could see the occasional flash of a bayonet. Some weapon on which the sunlight struck would blaze for a little while like a glittering star, and then vanish. Sometimes the clouds shifted ; then it would grow darker and the rain would be heavier. An hour after our start I could feel a streamlet of cold water trickling down my back.

The first day's march was not a long one—from Kishenev to the village of Gaouren is only thirteen miles. All the same, not being accustomed to carry 25 to 30 lbs. weight with me, I was so tired by the time we reached the hut where we were to pass the night that at first I could not even sit down ; I leaned up against the wall with my knapsack, and remained for about ten minutes just as I was, with my rifle in my hand. One of the soldiers, going into the kitchen to fetch dinner, had pity on me and took my kettle with his own ; but when he came back he found me already sound asleep. I did not wake until

four in the morning, when I was awaked by the insufferably harsh sound of the horn, playing a military march. Five minutes later I was again tramping along the dirty, clay road, under a fine, drizzling rain, that seemed to come down through a sieve.

In front of me was moving along someone's grey back, with a calf-skin knapsack, in which the iron kettle rattled, strapped on to it, and the rifle across the shoulder ; on both sides of me and behind me moved other such grey figures. During the first days I could not tell them apart. The 222d regiment of the line, in which I had been enrolled, consisted for the most part of peasants from the Viatka and Kostroma provinces. They had all broad, weather-tanned faces, with high cheek-bones, small grey eyes, and light colourless hair and beards. Although I remembered several names, I did not know which name belonged to which man. A fortnight later I could not understand how I could have confused together two of my neighbours, one of whom marched side by side with me, and the other with the possessor of the grey back which was always before my eyes. At first I called these two promiscuously Feodorov and Zhitkov, and constantly mistook them for one another ; and yet they were not in the least alike.

Feodorov, the corporal, was a young fellow of about twenty-two, of middle height and slender, even graceful build. He had a regular, chiselled face, with beautifully outlined nose, mouth and chin, a fair, curly beard, and merry blue eyes. When the order was given, 'Singers forward!' he always took the lead in our company, and would give out in a pure chest tenor, with a high falsetto on the upper notes,—

'The Tzar is ca-a-alled into the Senate.' . . .

He was a native of the Vladimir province, but had lived in St Petersburg from his childhood. Contrary to the usual result in such cases, he had not been spoiled by the St Petersburg education ; it had only given him a certain polish, and had taught him, among other things, the use of various learned words.

'Of course, Vladimir Mikhailovich,' he would say to me, 'I may have more sense in me than Uncle Zhitkov, because "Peter" * has had its influence upon me. There's civilisation in "Peter," but in their villages there's nothing but ignorance and savagery. But all the same, as he's a man that's getting on in life, and, so to say, has come through and seen various chances of fate, I can't shout

* Popular name for St Petersburg.

at him, you know. He's forty, and I'm only twenty-two, although I'm corporal of the company for all that.'

'Uncle Zhitkov' was a regular peasant, unusually strong, and always wearing a gloomy expression. His face was dark, with high cheek-bones; and his eyes were small and scowling. He never smiled, and rarely spoke. He was a carpenter by trade, and had been in the reserve when our army was mobilised. In a few months more he would have been completely free from the service; but war was declared, and Zhitkov had to go, leaving at home a wife and five little children. Notwithstanding his unfortunate appearance and perpetual gloom, there was about him something kind and strong and attractive. It seems to me now utterly incomprehensible that I could ever have confused together these two neighbours; but for the first few days they seemed to me exactly alike—grey, buttoned-up, and shivering with cold.

All the first half of May it rained incessantly, and we had no tents. The endless clayey road went uphill or downhill with almost every mile, and we had hard work to march. Great lumps of mud stuck to our feet, and from the low, grey sky the perpetual rain fell drizzling on to us. There

seemed to be no end to the rain—no hope of getting dry and warm even at night; the Roumanians would not let us into their houses; and, indeed, there was no room for such enormous numbers. We had to pass through the towns and villages, and stop for the night somewhere in the open air.

‘Halt! ‘Pile arms!’

Then we would eat our hot broth and lie down anywhere in the mud, water above us, water below us; we felt as if it had soaked right through our bodies. We would wrap ourselves up, shivering, in our cloaks; we would gradually begin to feel a damp kind of warmth, and at last would fall asleep, and awake only at the hated roll-call. Again the grey column, the grey sky, the muddy road, and the wet, dismal hillocks and dells. It was very trying for everyone.

‘All the flood-gates of heaven are opened!’ exclaimed, with a sigh, our sergeant-major Karpov, an old soldier, who had fought at Khiva; ‘we are getting sodden through with this wet!’

‘We shall get dry again, Vasili Karpych!’ said Feodorov; ‘you’ll see, when the sun comes out, it’ll dry us up fast enough! We have a long way to go; we shall have time enough to get dry, and to get wet again, on

the way. Mikhailovich!' he went on, turning to me,—'Is it far to the Danube?'

'Another three weeks' march.'

'Three weeks more? 'Why, we've been a fortnight already.'

'We're going into the devil's jaws,' muttered Uncle Zhitkov.

'What are you grumbling about, you old rascal? you're just upsetting all the lads! What do you mean by the devil's jaws? Why do you talk that sort of stuff for?'

'Well, do you think we're going for a holiday?' retorts Zhitkov.

'Not for a holiday, but to keep the oath, as is right and proper! . . . 'What did you say when you took the oath, eh? . . . "*Caring not for my life*" . . . Ugh! you old blockhead, you! You'd best be careful!'

'What have I said, Vasili Karpych? I am going, ain't I? If we've got to die, we may as well die. Doesn't make much difference—'

'A-ha! You'd best shut up!'

Zhitkov says no more, but his face grows gloomier than ever. No one cares to talk much, marching is too difficult. We slip and stumble, and many fall, face downwards, in the liquid mud. The whole battalion swears furiously. Feodorov alone keeps up his spirits, and, never wearying, tells me anec-

dote after anecdote of life in St Petersburg and in his native village.

Everything comes to an end at last. One morning I awoke in our bivouac, beside a village where we were to rest for a day, to see a blue sky and brilliant sunshine flashing on the white cottages and vineyards of the village. I heard merry, animated voices. The soldiers had already got up and dried their clothes, and now were resting after the exhausting ten days' march in the rain without shelter. The tents arrived during the day, and the soldiers at once set to work to unroll them. They drove in the poles and set up the tents, and then almost everyone lay down in the shade.

‘They haven’t helped us against the rain; at least they’ll keep the sun off us.’

‘Yes, so that the gentleman shouldn’t get sunburnt,’ said Feodorov, slyly winking in my direction.





II.

THERE were only two officers in our division — the commander, Captain Zaikin, and a subaltern, Sub-Lieutenant Stebelkov. The commander was a middle-aged man, fat and good-humoured ; Stebelkov was a mere lad, who had just left school. They lived in peace and amity ; the captain made much of the sub-lieutenant, offered him food and drink, and in the rain even warmed him under his own macintosh cloak. When the tents were given out our two officers shared one between them, and, as the officers' tents were roomy, the captain resolved to take me in too.

Tired out with a sleepless night (our division had been told off, the evening before, to bring in the baggage, and we had spent the night dragging it out of a hollow, and even pulling it up, by the help of 'Du-

binushka,' from a stream which had overflowed), I was sleeping soundly after dinner. The commander's man waked me by touching me lightly on the shoulder.

'Mr Ivanov! Gentleman Ivanov!' he whispered, as softly as though he did not want to wake me, but, on the contrary, was taking the greatest care not to disturb me.

'What is it?'

'The commander wants you.'

Then, as I began to put on my knapsack and rifle, he added,—

'I was to bring you just as you are.'

I found visitors in Zaikin's tent. Besides the two occupants, there were two other officers, the adjutant of the regiment and the commander of the riflemen's division, Wentzel. In 1877 the battalion consisted of five divisions instead of the present four; the riflemen's division marched just behind ours, so that the last ranks of our division, when marching, were close to their front ranks. Thus I had marched almost among the riflemen, and had several times heard from them the worst possible accounts of staff-captain Wentzel. All the four officers were sitting round a box, which did duty for a table, and on which stood the samovar, tea-things, and a bottle. They were drinking tea.

'Mr Ivanov! come in; come in, please!'

cried the captain. 'Nikita! Bring a glass or cup or mug, or whatever you've got! Move a bit, Wentzel, my lad; make room for him.'

Wentzel rose and bowed to me very courteously. He was a short, thin, young man, pale and nervous. 'What restless eyes and what thin lips he has!' came into my head. The adjutant, without rising, held out his hand to me.

'Lukin,' he said, introducing himself shortly.

I felt uncomfortable. The officers sat in silence; Wentzel sipping tea with rum in it, the adjutant puffing a short pipe. Stebelkov, after greeting me with a nod, went on with the book he was reading—a tattered copy of some translated novel, which had travelled in his portmanteau from Russia across the Danube, and which afterwards returned to Russia in a still more tattered condition. Our host poured some tea into a large earthenware mug, which he filled up with an enormous quantity of rum.

'There you are, Mr Student! Don't you be offended with me; I'm a plain man. For that matter, we're all plain fellows here. And you're an educated man, so you must make allowances for us—eh?'

He swooped down upon my hand with

his huge paw, like a bird of prey seizing its victim, and shook it several times in the air, looking affectionately at me the while with his little, round, goggle-eyes.

‘You are a student?’ asked Wentzel.

‘A former student, sir.’

He smiled and lifted his restless eyes to my face. I thought of the soldier’s accounts of him, but at that moment I doubted their truth.

‘What is the need of “sir”? Here, in the tent, you are one of us—simply a man of culture among other men of culture,’ he said softly.

‘Culture—that’s just it!’ cried Zaikin; ‘a student! I’m fond of students, though they are such a mutinous lot. I’d have been a student myself, if it hadn’t been for my fate.’

‘What particular sort of fate have you got, Ivan Platonych?’ asked the adjutant.

‘Well, somehow I never could get through with the preliminaries. Mathematics I could manage somehow, but as for all the rest . . . it was no use, nothing would come of it. All this grammar business . . . and then spelling . . . All the time I was in the cadet school I couldn’t learn to write properly. Couldn’t, indeed!’

‘Do you know,’ said the adjutant to me between two huge puffs of smoke, ‘how Ivan

Platonych manages to make four mistakes in the word *eshchàu?**

‘There, there; shut up, you old granny, you!’ said Zaikin, waving him off with one hand.

‘But it’s true. *I—zh—sh—o.* What do you think of that?’ And the adjutant burst out laughing aloud.

‘Hold your jaw. You’re another — call yourself un adjutant! Who writes *Stol*† with a *y—e*?’

The adjutant collapsed altogether; the subaltern, Stebelkov, who had just got his mouth full of tea, sent the tea spluttering all over his novel, and extinguished one of the two candles that lighted the tent. I, too, could not help laughing. Ivan Platonych, more delighted than anyone else with his own joke, thundered with peals of bass laughter. Wentzel alone did not laugh.

‘So it was grammar and spelling, Ivan Platonych?’ he asked, in his former low voice.

‘Grammar and spelling, yes, my lad, and — and all the rest, you know. Don’t you remember how someone got through geography as far as the equator, and through history as far as “the era”? No, of course, all that’s rubbish, that was not the reason. I simply pitched my money away and lived at the

* Still.

† Table.

top of my speed. You see, Ivanov— What's your Christian name and patronymic?’

‘Vladimir Mikhailych.’

‘Vladimir Mikhailych? All right. Well, you see, I was a wild sort of fellow when I was young. Didn’t I have a jolly good time, too! Ah, well, you know what the song says:—

“In my youth I dreamed of nought but pleasure,
Gold had I to spend or give;
Now my joy is wasted with my treasure,
As a wretched slave I live.”

‘Well, I entered this honourable, but extremely military, regiment as a cadet. They sent me to the military college, and I scrambled through the examinations somehow, and here I’ve been plodding away for over a dozen years. Now, we’ve got to set to and slash at the Turks. Come, gentlemen, let’s have a drink of the real stuff, neat. What’s the good of spoiling it with tea? Let’s drink to “food for powder.”’

‘*Chair-à-canon!*’ said Wentzel.

‘*Chair-à-canon!* by all means, have it in French if you like. Our captain’s a clever lad, Vladimir Mikhailych, he knows foreign languages, and can say all sorts of German rhymes by heart. Look here, my lad, what I called you here for was to ask you to move into my tent. You can’t be comfort-

able packed in with the privates—six in one tent. And then, the vermin. 'You'll be better off here.'

'Thank you, but I would rather not accept.'

'What for? Stuff! Nikita, bring in his knapsack. Which tent are you in.'

'The second to the right. But please allow me to stop there. You see, I shall have to be together with the privates most of the time, so I had better keep with them altogether.'

The captain looked at me attentively, as though he would read my thoughts. After thinking a moment, he said,—

'Do you mean that you want to be on friendly terms with them?'

'Yes, if it is possible.'

'You are right. I respect you for it. You had better stop there.'

He again seized my hand in his great paw, and shook it in the air.

A little later, I took leave of the officers and went out of the tent. It was growing dark, and the men were putting on their cloaks, to be ready at dawn. The companies drew up into long rows, so that every battalion found a hollow square, inside of which were the tents and field guns. All our division was assembled that evening because of the day's rest. The drums beat the roll-

call, and from somewhere far off came the word of command.

‘Regiments to prayer, caps off !’

And twelve thousand men uncovered their heads. ‘Our Father, which art in Heaven,’ our company led off, and all the rows, one after another, began to chant. Sixty choirs of two hundred voices each sang independently of each other, so there was a good deal of discord ; and yet the prayer had a solemn and touching sound. One after another the choirs left off singing ; at last, far off, in the battalion standing at the further edge of the camp, the last company ended : ‘But deliver us from evil.’ Then came a short flourish of drums. ‘Caps on !’

The soldiers settled down to sleep. In our tent, where, as in the others, six persons squeezed into the space of two square fathoms—my place was at the edge. I lay for a long time watching the stars and the bonfires of far-off troops, listening to the soft, confused sound of the great camp. In the next tent someone was telling someone else a story, continually repeating the words, ‘So then, you see’

‘So then, you see, the prince came to his wife, and began telling her all about it. So then, you see, she Liutikov, are you asleep ? All right, sleep away and

Christ be with you! O Lord, Queen of Heaven, and the holy fathers,' whispers the narrator, and falls asleep.

A sound of voices comes from the officers' tent, too. Along the canvas move huge, distorted shadows, cast by the light within, of the officers sitting in the tent. Now and then I hear a burst of laughter: that is the adjutant giggling. A sentinel, with his rifle, walks backwards and forwards along the line; opposite us, on the bivouac of the artillery, which is encamped near to us, stands another sentinel with a naked sabre. From that direction I can hear, now and then, the pawing of the tethered horses. I can hear them neigh, and quietly champ their oats with the same good-natured, crunching sound that I have heard, far from the war, in country posting stations in my home, on just such starlit nights. The seven stars of the Great Bear glittered just above the horizon, far lower than at home. 'I must look at the Pole-star,' I thought, for St Petersburg would be in that direction;—St Petersburg, where I had left my mother, my friends and all that was dear to me. Over my head shone the familiar constellations; the Milky Way was not a mere shimmer, but a brilliant, calm, triumphant band of light. In the south the

big stars of some constellation, unknown at home, burned, one with red, another with greenish fire. 'I wonder, came into my head, 'when we go on further, past the Danube, past the Balkans, to Constantinople, shall I see more new stars, and what will they be like?'

I was not sleepy; I got up and began to pace the damp grass between our battalion and the artillery. A dark figure passed me, with a clinking sword; I recognised an officer by the sound, and saluted. The officer came up to me, and turned out to be Wentzel.

'Can't you sleep, Vladimar Mikhailych?' he asked in his soft, low voice.

'No, sir.'

'My name is Piotr Nikolaevich. . . . I can't sleep either. I sat and sat at your commander's, till at last I got bored; they have begun playing cards, and they've all had too much to drink. . . . Oh, what a night.'

He walked on beside me. Reaching the end of the line we turned back, and walked several times backwards and forwards in silence. Wentzel spoke first:—

'Tell me, you came to the war of your own choice?'

'Yes.'

'What attracted you to it?'

‘How should I say?’ I answered, not caring to enter into details. ‘Chiefly, of course, the desire to see something—to experience something.’

‘And, no doubt, to study the peasant in the person of his representative, the soldier?’ asked Wentzel. It was dark, and I could not see the expression of his face, but caught the ironical tone of his voice.

‘Study! How is one to study when all one thinks of is how to get to camp and to go to sleep!’

‘No; but, joking apart . . . tell me, why wouldn’t you move into your commander’s tent? Surely you don’t value the opinion of these clowns?’

‘Of course I value their opinion, as I do that of all persons whom I have no cause not to respect.’

‘I have no cause not to believe you. Indeed, for that matter, that sort of thing’s the rage now-a-days. Even literature exalts the peasant into a sort of pearl of creation.’

‘Who talks of pearls of creation, Piotr Nikolaevich? If you would recognise a human being, that would be something.’

‘Oh, what is the use of empty phrases like that? Who doesn’t recognise him? A human being! Well, let him be a human being; what sort of human being? that’s another

question. . . . There, let us talk about something else.'

We dropped into conversation. Wentzel evidently was very well read ; and, as Zaikin had said, knew several languages. The captain's remark that he could 'say rhymes by heart' also proved to be true. We began talking of the French, and Wentzel recited, with much feeling, Alfred de Musset's '*Nuit de Décembre*.' He recited well, simply and expressively, and with a good French accent. When he had finished, he paused a moment and added,—

'Yes, that is fine ; but all the French put together are not worth ten lines of Schiller, Goethe, or Shakespeare.

Before undertaking the command of the company, he had been in charge of the regimental library, and had closely followed the course of Russian, as well as foreign, literature. Through this the conversation brought us back to the former subject. Wentzel argued hotly.

'When I entered the regiment, almost as a boy, I did not think in the way I have been talking to you now. I tried to manage by talking to the men. I tried to gain a moral influence over them. But in a year they worried me almost to death. All that remained in me from the so-called "ad-

vanced" books I had read, when it was brought into contact with reality, turned out to be sentimental trash. And now I think that the only means of making oneself understood is—that!"

He made some gesture with his hand. It was so dark that I did not understand him.

"What is "that," Piotr Nikolaevich?"

"A fist!" he answered shortly. "Good-night, anyhow; it's time to get to sleep."

I saluted to him and went back to my tent. I was both pained and disgusted.

I thought that everyone in the tent was asleep, but two or three minutes after I had lain down, Feodorov, who lay beside me, asked softly,—

"Mikhailych, are you asleep?"

"No."

"Were you walking with Wentzel?"

"Yes, with him."

"What was he like with you? Peaceable?"

"Peaceable enough; amiable even."

"Well, I never did! That comes of belonging to the gentlefolk! It's another story with our sort!"

"Why? Is he so fierce?"

"Eh-h-h! Isn't he just! There are broken heads in the Second Rifles! He's a wild beast!"

Then he fell asleep, so that my next question was answered only by his quiet and regular breathing. I wrapped my cloak round me, and everything faded from my mind and vanished in a sound sleep.





III.

AFTER the rains the hot weather began. Just about that time we left the badly-made country road where our feet had stuck in the slushy soil, and came out on to the great high-road leading from Yassy to Bucharest. Our first day's march along that high-road, between Tekuch and Berlad, will never be forgotten by any of those who endured it. There were 110 degs. (Fahr.) in the shade, and the day's march was thirty-two miles. There was no wind ; the fine limestone dust, raised by the thousands of feet, hung over the road, filled our mouths and noses, powdered our hair till there was no distinguishing the colour, and, mixing with perspiration, coated our faces with dirt and turned us all to negroes. For some reason, instead of being in our shirts, we had to march in uniform. The sunbeams heated the black cloth through, and scorched our heads intolerably under the

black caps ; we could feel through the soles of our boots the glaring heat of the rubble of the road. The men gasped and struggled for breath. As ill-luck would have it, wells were few and far between, and in most of them there was so little water that the head of our column (the whole division marched at once) baled out all the water there was, and we, after terrible struggling and crushing at the wells, got nothing but an earthy liquid, more like mud than water. When even that was not to be had, the men began to fall. During that one day, in our battalion alone, nearly ninety men fell by the way. Three died of sunstroke.

I endured this torture more easily than most of the others did. Perhaps this was because our regiment consisted chiefly of northerns, whereas I was accustomed from childhood to the hot season of the steppes ; perhaps there were other reasons.

In any case, while others were falling by the roadside, I was still able to keep my senses. In Tekuch I had provided myself with a huge hollow gourd, which contained at the least four pints of water. I filled it several times on the way ; half the water I drank myself, and the other half I divided among my neighbours. A man struggles on and on by sheer force of will ; but the heat

conquers him ; his knees begin to give way under him ; his body sways like that of a drunkard ; the dark flush on his face shows even through the coating of dirt and dust ; his hand catches convulsively at his rifle. A mouthful of water restores him for a few minutes, but finally the man drops senseless on the hard, dusty road. 'Orderly !' cry the hoarse voices of his neighbours. The orderly's business is to drag the fallen man to the side of the road and help him, but the orderly himself is in almost the same condition. The ditches on both sides of the road are strewn with prostrate figures. . . . Feodorov and Zhitkov marched beside me, and though evidently suffering, kept up their courage ; the effect of the heat upon them was to reverse their characters. Feodorov held his tongue, only sighing heavily now and then, with a piteous look in his beautiful eyes, now inflamed with the dust ; Zhitkov swore and orated incessantly.

'There goes another down. . . . D—n you, keep your bayonet straight !' he shouted snappishly, starting away from the bayonet of a falling soldier, the point of which had almost put his eye out. 'O Lord ! O Holy Virgin ! why dost thou persecute us ? If it weren't for that bloodsucker, I'm ready to tumble down myself !'

'What bloodsucker, uncle?' I asked.

'Nyemtzev, the staff-captain. He's in command to-day; he's just behind us. We'd best keep on, or he'll give us what for. . . . He won't leave a sound place about you.' . . .

I knew already that the soldiers had corrupted the name 'Wentzel' into 'Nyemtzev.* The sound was much alike, and was more Russian.

I left my place in the ranks. It was a little easier to walk at the side of the road, as there was less dust and crowding. Many walked at the side; on that miserable day no one troubled about keeping up the proper form of the column. Little by little I lagged behind, and soon found myself at the tail of the column.

Wentzel, exhausted, panting for breath, but excited, caught me up.

'How are you?' he asked, hoarsely. 'Let's walk on one side a bit; I'm dead beat.'

'Will you have some water?'

He eagerly drank several gulps of water from my gourd.

'Thanks, I feel better. We're having a nice day of it!'

For some time we walked side by side without speaking.

'By-the-bye,' he said, 'you still haven't

* From 'Nyemetz,' a German.

moved into Ivan Platonych's tent, have you ?'

'No.'

'That's stupid. Excuse my frankness. Good-bye ; I must get back to the tail of my column. There seems to be a wonderful number of these tender creatures tumbling down.'

I walked on a few steps, and then, looking backwards, saw Wentzel stooping over a fallen soldier and dragging him by the shoulder.

'Get up, you hound ! get up !'

I could hardly recognise my cultivated acquaintance. He poured out a torrent of coarse abuse. The soldier, who was almost unconscious, looked at the infuriated officer with a hopeless expression. His lips whispered something.

'Get up ! Get up this instant ! Ah ! you won't ? Then there, there, there !'

Wentzel seized his sword and, with the heavy iron scabbard, struck blow after blow upon the unhappy man's shoulders, already sore from the knapsack and rifle. I could not bear it ; I went up to him.

'Piotr Nikolaevich !'

'Get up !' The hand with the sword was lifted for another blow, but I caught it firmly in mine.

‘For God’s sake, Piotr Nikolaevich, let him alone!’

He turned his frenzied face round to me. With eyes starting from his head and convulsively distorted mouth, he was terrible to see. He tore his hand from mine with a violent movement. I thought he was going to burst out and storm at me for my insolence (to seize an officer by the arm was, indeed, great insolence), but he restrained himself.

‘Look here, Ivanov, don’t ever do that sort of thing! If there had been in my place some pompous idiot like Shchurov or Timofeyev, you would pay dearly for your joke. You must remember that you are only a private, and that for things of that kind you may get simply—shot!’

‘I don’t care. I could not see it and not interfere.’

‘That does honour to your tender feelings, but you display them in the wrong place. What else can I do with these’ . . . (his face expressed contempt—even more—even a kind of hatred). ‘Of all these dozens, tumbling down like women, there are probably only a few that are really exhausted. I don’t do these things from cruelty; there is no cruelty in me. I must keep up order and discipline. If it were possible to talk to them, I would manage them by exhorta-

tion; but words are nothing to them. The only thing they feel is physical pain—'

I did not stop to hear him out, but hurried away to catch up my column, which was already far ahead. I rejoined Feodorov and Zhitkov only when our battalion turned from the high road into a field, where a halt was called.

'Mikhailych, what were you after, talking to staff-captain Wentzel?' asked Feodorov, when I dropped, exhausted, beside him, hardly able even to put down my rifle.

'Talking!' grumbled Zhitkov. 'Is that what you call talking? He caught hold of his arm. Eh, *barine* Ivanov, keep clear of Nyemtzev! Don't be too cocksure because he likes to talk to you! You'll come to grief with him in good earnest!'





I V.

LATE in the evening we reached Fokshan, passed through the dark, silent, dusty little town, and came out into a field. There was not a gleam of light to be seen; the battalions were settled for the night anyhow, and the exhausted men slept like the dead; hardly anyone cared to eat the dinner which was provided. A soldier's meals are always 'dinner,' whether eaten early in the morning, at midday or at night. The whole night long the stragglers were coming up. At dawn we started on the march again, consoling ourselves with the thought that, after this one more day we should have a day's halt.

Again the same moving rows, the same crushing weight of the knapsack on the weary shoulders, the same pain in the blistered and swollen feet. But we hardly realised the first seven miles of the way. Our short night's rest had not been enough to recover us from the exhaustion of the

day before, and we marched in a half-dazed condition. For my part, I slept so soundly while marching, that when a halt was called, I could hardly believe that we had made seven miles, and could not recollect a single spot that we had passed on the way. Only when the columns began to draw up all together and fall out of line for the halt, did we come to our senses, and think with delight of the whole hour's rest before us, when we could unstrap, boil water in our kettles, and lie down at our ease to drink our hot tea. Every day, directly the weapons were put down and the knapsacks taken off, most of the men began collecting fuel, generally using the dried stalks of last year's maize. Two bayonets were stuck into the ground, a ramrod was placed on them, and two or three kettles slung across it. The light, dry stalks burned brightly; they were always placed on that side from which the wind blew, so that the flames licked the blackened kettles, and in ten minutes the water bubbled merrily. The tea was thrown straight into the boiling water and allowed to boil. The result was a strong, almost black liquid, which was usually drunk without sugar, as the provision department, which had given a large amount of tea (it was even used for smoking when the men were out of tobacco),

had provided very little sugar, and the tea was drunk in enormous quantities. A kettleful (seven tumblers) was the average amount per head.

It may seem strange that I should enter into so many details. But the life of soldiers on the march is so hard, there is so much hardship and suffering in it, and so little hope of anything good in the future, that some trifling luxury, such as tea, forms a real joy. It was worth while to see the seriously happy faces of the rough, gloomy, sunburnt soldiers, old and young alike—though, indeed, there was hardly anyone among us over forty years old—as they, like little children, arranged the twigs and stubble under the kettles, made up the fire, and advised one another :—

‘No, Liutikov ; put it there—put it at the edge there. That’s right ; that’s the way. It’s catching now ; it’ll boil in a minute !’

Tea, occasionally, in cold and rainy weather, a little grog, and a pipe of tobacco—these are all the soldier’s pleasures, except, of course, all-healing sleep, in which one can forget both physical hardships and the thought of the dark, terrible future. Tobacco played with us no small part in these joys of life, as it roused and supported our worn-out nerves. A closely-filled pipe would make the round of as many as ten persons, and

then return to its owner, who would take a last puff, knock out the ashes, and, with an air of importance, put away the pipe in his boot. I remember how grieved I was when one of my friends, to whom I had lent my pipe, lost it, and how distressed and ashamed the man himself was. It seemed to us as if he had lost a whole fortune that had been entrusted to him.

At the long halt (about mid-day) we had from one-and-a-half to two hours' rest. After drinking the tea, nearly everyone used to go to sleep. There would be dead silence in the bivouac, but for the sentinel pacing up and down before the standard, and here and there an officer awake. One lies on the ground, with one's knapsack for a pillow, half-asleep, half enjoying oneself; the hot sun scorches one's face and neck, the flies persistently sting, and will not let one get to sleep properly. Dreams and realities get mixed up together; it is such a short while ago that we lived a life utterly different from this, that in this state of half-consciousness it seems as if we should wake up in a minute and find ourselves at home among the familiar surroundings, and that this steppe, this naked soil with thorns for grass, this pitiless sun and dry wind, these thousands of strangely-clothed people, in dusty white shirts, these stacks of weapons would

all vanish from our sight. They are all so like a strange, miserable dream. . . .

‘Time’s u-u-up !’ shouts in a long, gloomy cry the powerful voice of our short, bearded battalion commander, Major Chornoglarov. The prostrate crowd of white shirts begins to move ; sighing and stretching their limbs the men get up, put on their wallets and knapsacks, and form into line.

‘Take up arms.’

Each man picks out his own weapon. To this day I remember my rifle, No. 18,635, with the butt-end a little darker than most of the others, and a long scratch on the dark lacquer. One more word of command, and the battalion, forming into a column, marches out on to the road. In front is led the commander’s horse, a bay stallion, named ‘Barbarian,’ bridling and curveting and pawing the ground. The major rides him only on exceptional occasions, and usually follows his ‘Barbarian’ on foot with the measured tread of a first-rate walker. He takes care to show the soldiers that their superior officers too ‘do their best,’ and for this reason he is a favourite with the men. He is always cool and composed, never smiles or jokes, rises in the morning earlier than anyone else, lies down to sleep last of all his battalion at night, and behaves to the soldiers with firmness and self-control, never permitting himself

to shout at or strike them in fits of temper. The men say that, if it were not for the major, Wentzel would be worse even than he is.

It was a hot day, but not so hot as the day before. Moreover, we were now marching, not on the high-road, but beside the railway-line, along a narrow path, so that most of the soldiers walked on the grass. There was no dust ; clouds began to gather ; here and there a great, solitary drop would fall. We watched the sky, and spread out our hands to feel whether it was raining yet. Even yesterday's stragglers recovered their spirits ; there was now not much further to go—only another six or seven miles—and then we should have a rest, a longed-for rest, of not one short night alone, but a night, a whole day and another night. The men brightened up and felt an impulse to sing ; Feodorov's voice rang out among the singers, as they struck up the famous—

‘There was a battle near Poltava.’

On reaching the line—

‘Suddenly a shameless bullet flew into the Tzar's own hat,’ he began a senseless and unworthy doggerel, very popular, however, among the soldiers, about how a certain Liza, going into the forest, found there a black beetle, and what were the consequences. Then followed the

historical ballad of how Peter the Great was called into the Senate; and on top of that a doggerel song of our regiment :—

‘ Said the White Tzar Alexander, said our Emperor to us :
“ Now, my lads, my gallant soldiers, do your best before your Tzar ! ”
So we showed him we’re good fellows, and he thanked us for our pains.
‘ Our battalion’s bold commander, Chornoglazov is his name,
He’s no lazy sluggard, but an officer that drills his men.
When he sits on horseback there is not a man shall say him nay.’

And so on, for fifty verses.

‘ Feodorov,’ I asked one day, ‘ why do you sing all that rubbish about Liza ? ’ I spoke to him, too, about several other songs, absurd and indecent to such a degree that their very indecency lost all meaning, and became a mere succession of senseless sounds.

‘ It comes natural, Vladimir Mikhailych. But, dear me, that’s not singing ! That’s just a sort of shouting to keep one’s lungs open. Seems easier to march, somehow.’

When the singers got tired the band began to play. It was always much easier to walk to the sound of the loud, rhythmical and usually merry marches ; all the men, even the most weary, would brighten up, march carefully in step, and keep their proper places in

the column without lagging; the battalion would be transformed beyond recognition. I remember that one day we marched to the band music over four miles in an hour, without feeling any weariness; but when the tired musicians left off playing, the energy roused by the music failed us, and I felt that I should fall with exhaustion every minute; indeed, I should have fallen if we had not soon halted to rest.

About three-and-a-half miles beyond the midday halt we came to an obstruction. We were marching along a valley formed by a stream; on one side were hills, on the other a narrow and rather high railway embankment. The recent rains had flooded the valley, forming a great pool, over 200 feet wide, across our path. The high railway embankment ran across it like a dam, and we had to walk along the line. The signalman let the first battalion pass, and get safely across the pond; but then announced that the rest of us must wait, as a train would pass in five minutes. We halted, and had just put down our arms, when, at the turn of the road, appeared the familiar carriage of the general in command of our brigade.

Our general was a fine fellow. Such a larynx as he possessed I have never come across, even in the archepiscopal choirs. His

thundering bass bellowed in the air like the sound of trumpets; and his large, solid figure, with big red face, huge grey whiskers streaming in the wind, and thick black brows overshadowing small eyes that shone like live coals, had a most impressive effect when he sat on horseback and gave out the word of command to his brigade. On one occasion, during some military exercises in the Khodynsky field in Moscow, he presented so gallant and warlike appearance as to enrapture an old artisan in the crowd, who exclaimed,—

‘What a brick! That’s the sort we want’

From that day forth our general was always nicknamed ‘the Brick’.

He dreamed of prowess and exploits, and during the whole campaign was always accompanied by several volumes of military history. His favourite theme of conversation with the officers was the Napoleonic campaign, which he loved to criticise. This, of course, I knew only by rumour, as I very seldom saw the general; he usually passed us at about midday in his carriage, to which three good horses were harnessed, and, driving to the place where we were to pass the night, would take lodgings and stay there till late the next morning, and then catch us up again. When he passed us the soldiers

always observed carefully the degree of redness of his face, and of hoarseness in the deafening voice with which he shouted at us:—‘Good-day, Starobyeltzy !’ *

‘Good-day, your excellency !’ the men would answer, and then remark to one another:—‘The Brick wants a hair of the dog that bit him.’

After this the general would sometimes drive on ahead without any further incidents, but sometimes would stop to give a terrific ‘wigging’ to the commander of some division.

Seeing that our battalion had halted, the general flew towards us and sprang out of the carriage as rapidly as was consistent with his solidity. The major hastily came forward to meet him.

‘What is the matter ? Why have they halted ? Who allowed it ?’

‘Your excellency, the road is flooded, and a train is just going to pass along “the line.”

‘The road is flooded ? A train ? Nonsense ! You are accustoming the men to effeminacy. You are making old women of them. I forbid you to halt without permission ! I will put you under arrest, sir !’

‘Your excellency. . . .’

‘Silence !’

*. Soldiers of the Starobyelsky regiment.

The general flashed his eyes wrathfully around and fastened upon another victim.

'What's this? Why isn't the commander of the second riflemen's division at his post? Staff-captain Wentzel! Please to come here!'

Wentzel advanced, and the general's wrath was poured out upon him in a torrent. I could hear that he tried to give some answer, raising his voice, but the general drowned him completely, and we could only guess that Wentzel must have said something disrespectful.

'To answer me? And with insolence?' bellowed the general. 'Silence! Take off his sword. Put him on duty at the money-chest under arrest. I'll make an example! . . . Afraid of a puddle! . . . Follow me, men! Remember Suvorov!'

The general hastily passed in front of the battalion, and went down to the water's edge with the awkward gait of a man who has been driving in a carriage for a long time.

'Follow me, men! Remember Suvorov!' he repeated, plunging with his shining top-boots into the water. The major, glancing backwards with a savage expression, followed him, and the battalion waded in after them. At first the water was only up to our knees, then to our waists, then still higher; the tall

general waded without difficulty, but the little major began to help himself along with his arms. The soldiers, like a flock of sheep at the washing, shoved and pushed one another and swayed from side to side, floundering and trying to free their feet, which stuck in the muddy bottom. The adjutant and the commanders of companies, who were on horseback, could, of course, have ridden across very comfortably, but, seeing the example set by the general, rode up to the water's edge, dismounted, and leading their horses by the bridle, waded through the dirty water, which the soldiers' feet had left thick and brown. Our company, which was formed of the tallest men in the battalion, got across without much difficulty, but the men of the eighth company, who waded side by side with us, and were all of small stature, were immersed up to their ears; some even began to choke and caught hold of us for support. A little soldier of gipsy race, with a white face and widely dilated black eyes, let his rifle go, and caught Uncle Zhitkov round the neck with both hands. Luckily for the gipsy, some one caught the state's weapon and saved it from sinking. About twenty yards further on the water grew shallower, and the men, feeling themselves out of danger, scrambled on, hurrying to the

further edge, shoving and swearing at one another. Many of our men were laughing, but the eighth company was in no laughing mood ; the faces of some of them were blue, not with cold alone. The riflemen hurried them on from behind.

‘Come, mannikins, get on ! You’ll be half-drowned !’ they shouted.

‘And no wonder ; it’s easy to get drowned here !’ answered voices from the eighth company. ‘It’s easy for him to lead the way ; he’s hardly got his whiskers wet. He’s a fine sort of a hero ; we might have all been drowned because of him.

‘You should have crept into my kettle, and I’d have carried you over as dry as a bone.’

‘Ah, you see, I didn’t think of it,’ good-humouredly answered a little soldier.

The cause of all this confusion having by this time got his feet out of the sticky mud of the bottom and reached dry land, stood majestically on the shore, watching the crowd floundering in the water. He was wet through and through ; the water was dripping even from his long whiskers. Streams of water ran from his clothes ; his patent top-boots were swollen out with water, as he stood shouting to encourage the soldiers.

‘Forwards, men ! in Suvorov’s fashion !’

The wet officers crowded round him with

gloomy faces. Wentzel stood among them with a distorted face, and without his sword. Meanwhile, the general's coachman, after trying the depth of the water in several places with his long whip, had got up on his box and driven safely across at a spot a little to one side of our crossing. The water was hardly up to the axles of the carriage wheels.

'That is where we ought to have crossed, your excellency,' remarked the major, calmly. 'Will you permit the men to get dry?'

'Certainly, certainly, Sergyey Nikolaich, mildly answered the general. The cold water had cooled his ardour. He got into his carriage, sat down, then stood up again and bellowed at the top of his mighty voice:

'Thank you, Starobyeltzy! You're brave lads!'

'Glad to do our best, your excellency!' confusedly shouted the soldiers; and the wet general drove on ahead.

The sun was still high, and we had only about three and a half miles more to go, so the major called a long halt. We undressed, made bonfires, dried our clothes, our boots, our knapsacks and wallets, and two hours later started afresh, already looking back upon our bath as a jest.

'And the Brick has put Wentzel under arrest!' said Feodorov, as we talked.

‘That’s no loss! He’ll have two days in front of the money chest, and so much the better,’ answered one of the riflemen from behind.

‘What’s it to you?’

‘To me? It’s not only I but the whole company that’s better off. At least we shall get two days’ peace. There’s no bearing him; that’s what it is to me!’

‘Patience, Cossack; you’ll be hetman some day! ’*

‘We’ve got to have patience, but I doubt we sha’n’t be hetmans, unless it’s in the next world,’ remarked Zhitkov in his usual gloomy tone; ‘if we get shot by the Turks.’

‘Come, uncle, don’t you get melancholy. You should think of how you and I have got ourselves dry and comfortable, and the Brick’s driving, as wet as a drowned rat,’ said Feodorov, and everyone burst out laughing at the joke.

* An Ukrainian proverb, equivalent to ‘Live, horse, and you’ll get grass.’





V.



UR road still ran beside the railway, and we were constantly passed, as we marched, by trains full of people, horses and stores.

The soldiers looked enviously at the horses' muzzles protruding from the open doors of the goods-trains passing us. Lucky horses, to have carriages given them—and we on foot!

‘Horses are stupid, they’d get off their feed,’ says Vasili Karpych, dogmatically. ‘That’s the use of being a man—to know how to behave.’

One day, during a halt, a Cossack galloped up with important news for our commanding officers. We were called up and formed into line in our white shirts and without knapsacks or weapons. None of us knew the reason of this. The officers examined each his own men; Wentzel, as usual, swore and shouted,

jerking crookedly fastened belts, and, with kicks and blows, telling his men to put their shirts straight. We were then led up to the railway-line, and, after a rather long process of forming and re-forming, the regiment was drawn up in two ranks along the line. The white row of shirts stretched out for three-quarters of a mile.

‘Men!’ shouted the major; ‘His Majesty the Emperor is going to pass!’

We stood and awaited the Emperor. Ours was a provincial division, which had been quartered far away from both St Petersburg and Moscow. Not more than one in ten of the soldiers had ever seen the Tzar, and all awaited the imperial train with impatience. Half-an-hour passed, and still the train did not come; the men were allowed to sit down. Conversations and anecdotes began.

‘Will he stop?’ asked someone.

‘What next! Stop for every regiment! If he looks at us out of the window it’s as much as he’ll do.’

‘And we sha’n’t be able to see which is he; there’ll be a lot of generals with him.’

‘I shall know him. I saw him the year before last at Khodynka, as close as that.’ And the speaker spread out his hands to show us how close he had been to the Emperor.

At last, after two hours' waiting, a little line of smoke appeared in the distance. The regiment rose and formed into line. First passed the train with the servants and provisions. The white-capped cooks and scullions looked out of the windows at us, laughing at something. The Emperor's train followed five hundred yards behind ; the engine-driver, seeing the regiment drawn up in line, slackened speed, and the carriages passed, ponderously rumbling, slowly before the eager eyes that looked at the windows. But all the blinds were drawn ; a Cossack and an officer, who stood on the platform of the last carriage, were the only occupants of the train that we saw. We watched the train going off, faster and faster in the distance, and then, after standing another three minutes, returned to the bivouac. The soldiers were grumbling and disappointed.

‘It'll be ages before we see him now !’

But we saw him very soon. Before reaching Ploeshti we were told that the Emperor would inspect the regiment there.

We passed before him, just as we were after the march, in the old dirty white shirts and trousers, in the old rusty, dust-covered boots with the old unsightly burdens of knapsack, biscuit-wallet and bottle hanging by a string. There was about the soldiers nothing elegant,

gallant, or heroic ; they were all very much like ordinary peasants ; nothing but the knapsacks and cartridge-bags showed that these peasants were on their way to the war. We were formed into a narrow column, four abreast, the streets not being wide enough for us to pass otherwise. I marched on the outside, trying to keep in step and in line, and thinking only that, if the Emperor and his suite should stand on the side, where I was, I should have to pass before his eyes, and quite close to him. But, glancing at Zhitkov, who was marching next to me, I saw that his face, stern and gloomy as ever, was nevertheless agitated, and I felt that a part of the general agitation was communicating itself to me, and that my heart had begun to beat faster than usual. It suddenly seemed to me as if everything depended for us upon how the Emperor would look at us. When, later on, I had to face bullets for the first time, I experienced a similar sensation.

The men marched faster and faster ; the step grew longer, the gait freer and bolder. I had no need to make any effort to keep in time ; my weariness had gone. It was as if we had developed wings which carried us forwards to the place from which sounded already military music and a deafening 'hurrah !' I do not remember the streets through which we

passed. I do not remember whether there were people in the streets, and whether they looked at us; I remember only the emotion that seized upon us, together with the consciousness of the terrible strength of the mass to which we belonged, and which was sweeping us along. I felt that for this mass nothing was impossible; that the torrent, with which I was rushing on, and of which I formed a part, could know no hindrance, that it would break down, destroy and annihilate everything. Every soldier thought of how the man before whom this torrent was sweeping by, could, with a single word, a single gesture of his hand, alter its direction, turn it back, or fling it again upon terrible obstacles; every soldier sought in this man's word or gesture the something unknown which was leading us to death. 'You lead us,' thought every man; 'we give our lives to you; look at us and be assured; we are ready to die.'

And he knew that we were ready to die. He saw the terrible ranks of men, firm in their determination, passing before him almost at a run, —children of a poor country, rugged, poorly-dressed soldiers. He felt that they were all going to death, calm and free from responsibility. He was mounted on a grey horse, which stood motionless, pricking up its ears at the music and the frenzied shouts of enthusi-

asm. There was a gorgeous suite round him ; but I remember no one of all the brilliant group on horseback, except the one man on the grey horse, in a plain uniform and white military cap. I remember the pale, weary face, wearied with the consciousness of how weighty was the resolve that had been taken. I remember how the tears poured down his face, falling on to the dark uniform in bright, glittering drops. I remember the convulsive motion of the hand holding the reins, and the quivering lips that were saying something—no doubt a greeting to the thousands of young, perishing lives for which he wept. All this flashed before my eyes and disappeared, as though lit up for an instant by lightning, as I rushed past him, breathless, not from running but from frantic, unnatural excitement, lifting up my rifle with one hand, waving my cap over my head with the other, and shouting a deafening 'hurrah !' which, in the general roar, I could not even hear myself.

All this flashed past and disappeared. Dusty streets, glaring in the scorching heat ; soldiers, exhausted with excitement and with keeping up their pace at almost a run for half-a-mile, fainting from the heat, the shouts of the officers, insisting that the men should keep in line and in step—that is all that I saw and heard five minutes later. And when,

after marching another mile-and-a-half through the stifling town, we came out into the pasture that had been chosen for our bivouac, I dropped on the ground, utterly exhausted in both body and soul.





VI.

DIFFICULT marches, dust, heat, weariness, worn and bleeding feet, short rest by day, dead sleep by night, the detested horn awaking us at daybreak, and always fields—fields unlike the fields at home—covered with tall verdure, with loudly-rustling, long, silky maize-leaves, or full-eared wheat, already yellowing here and there.

The same faces ; the same life of a regiment on the march ; the same conversations and anecdotes of home, of quarters in a provincial town ; the same criticisms on the officers.

Of the future the men spoke rarely and unwillingly. They had very vague ideas as to why we were going to the war, although the regiment had been stationed for a whole half-year near Kishenev, waiting to start. The reason of the impending war might have been

explained by them during that time, but apparently, this had been considered unnecessary. I remember a soldier once asking me :—

‘I say, Vladimir Mikhailych, shall we soon reach Bokhara?’

I at first thought that my ear had deceived me, but when he repeated the question I told him that Bokhara was beyond two seas, that it was nearly three thousand miles away, and that we were not likely ever to get there.

‘No, Mikhailych, you’re wrong there. The *pisar** told me about it. He said: “We shall just cross the Danube,” says he, “and there we shall be at once in Bokhara.”’

‘Ah! Not Bokhara—Bulgaria,’ I explained.

‘Call it what you like—Burgaria, Bokhara, it’s all one how you call it, I suppose?’

And he broke off, evidently offended.

They only knew that they were going to fight the Turk, because he had shed so much blood. And they were anxious to be revenged upon the Turk, not so much for the bloodshed, about which they knew no details, as for the trouble that he had given to so many people and the hardships of the difficult march that were all on his account (‘All these hundreds of miles to go dragging along to get to a scoundrel like him!’) and because of

* Village clerk.

the soldiers on whom the lot had fallen at the conscription, and who had been forced to leave their homes and families and go off, all of them, somewhere into the distance to face bullets and cannon-balls. They had an idea that the Turk was a disorderly personage, a ringleader of mutiny, who must be subdued and suppressed.

We were much more occupied with the domestic affairs of the battalions or of the companies. In our company all went quietly and smoothly, but among the riflemen matters went from bad to worse. Wentzel continued as before ; the suppressed indignation of the men grew more and more intense, and after one incident, which even now, five years afterwards, I cannot remember without a sense of pain, reached the pitch of absolute hatred.

We had just passed through some town on the way, and had come out into a meadow, where the first regiment, which marched in front of us, had already halted. The place was charming ; on one side was a river, on the other a grove composed entirely of old oak-trees, probably a pleasure-ground for the town's-people. It was a fine, warm evening ; the sun was setting ; the regiment stood piling arms. Zhitkov and I began setting up the tent ; we placed the poles, then I held the

edge of the canvas while Zhitkov drove in the pegs with a stick.

‘Tighter! Hold it tighter, Mikhailych, my lad!’ He had begun, a few days before, to call me so. ‘That’s the way! That’s it!’

At that moment I heard behind me a regular succession of strange, dull sounds. I turned round.

The riflemen were standing in line. Wentzel, hoarsely shouting something, was striking a soldier in the face. The man, holding his rifle at his feet and not daring even to shrink away from the blows, stood with a dead, livid face, trembling from head to foot. Wentzel’s small, thin figure swayed to and fro with the force of his own blows, as he struck with both hands, now on one side of the man’s face, now on the other. Everyone around was silent; there was no sound but the thud of the blows and the hoarse muttering of the infuriated commander. Everything grew black before my eyes; I started forward. Zhitkov, understanding my gesture, jerked the canvas with all his might.

‘Hold it, you clumsy devil!’ he shouted, and burst out swearing at me in the foulest language possible. ‘Have you lost your fingers, eh? What are you looking at? What’s there to see, I’d like to know?’

Blow followed blow; blood was trickling

from the soldier's chin and upper lip. At last he fell. Wentzel turned, glanced along the whole line and shouted :—

‘ If any other scamp dares to smoke in the ranks, I'll give him worse than that. Pick up the beast, wash his face, and put him in the tent till he comes to his senses. Pile arms ! ’

His hands were red, swollen trembling, and blood-stained. He took out a hand-kerchief, wiped them, and walked away from the soldiers, who were piling their arms in gloomy silence. Several men, muttering to one another under their breath, were lifting the injured man from the ground and attending to him. Wentzel walked with a nervous, exhausted air ; he was pale and his eyes glittered, and the quivering muscles of his face showed how he was clenching his teeth. He passed us, and, meeting my steady gaze, smiled in a forced, cynical way with his thin lips alone, and, whispering something, walked on.

‘ Blood-sucker ! ’ said Zhitkov, in a tone full of hatred. ‘ And you, sir ; for shame ! . . . What should you go mixing up with it for ? D'you want to get shot ? Wait a bit ; they'll find a way to settle him ! ’

‘ Are they going to complain ? ’ I asked.
‘ To whom ? ’

'No, they won't complain. When we come to action, there's' . . .

He muttered something half to himself. I was afraid to understand him. Feodorov, who by this time had gone across to the riflemen and found out from them what the affair was about, came back to us.

'He knocks the men about for nothing at all!' he said. 'While they were marching this poor fellow, Matiushkin, smoked a cigar; then, when they halted, he stood his rifle, down and he'd got the cigar-end in his hand; he'd simply forgotten it. Well, and Wentzel saw it. . . . What a brute!' he added, mournfully, as he lay down in the tent we had set up. 'And the cigar had gone out, too; one could see the poor fellow had forgotten it.'

A few days later we arrived at Alexandria, where a great many troops were assembled. As we descended the high hill before the town, we could see a huge plain, covered with white tents, black human figures, and long baggage-trains, with here and there shining rows of brass cannon and green gun-carriages and chests. The streets of the town were crowded with officers and soldiers. From the open windows of the small and dirty hotels came the sounds of daring and

mournful Hungarian music, mingled with the clatter of dishes and noisy talking. The shops were overflowing with Russians. Our soldiers, the Roumanians, Germans and Jews, all shouted together, and no one understood anyone else ; quarrels over the value of the paper rouble could be heard at every step.

‘What’s the use of jabbering *‘douu galagan’*, you black-faced rascal? . . . Give me back ten kopecks! Ay, you, *domnul!*’

‘*Ounde eshte poshta?*’ asks an officer, armed with his ‘military interpreter’ (a little book supplied to the troops), and saluting with exaggerated politeness as he addressed a Roumanian dandy. The Roumanian explains where the post-office is, and the officer turns over the leaves of his ‘interpreter,’ looking in vain for the incomprehensible words, and politely expresses his thanks for the information, although he cannot understand it.

‘Confound it, mates, did you ever see such people? Their priests are like ours and their churches are like ours, and yet they haven’t got a bit of understanding in them!’

‘D’you want a silver rouble, eh?’ yells at the top of his voice a soldier with a shirt in his hand to a Roumanian stall-keeper in the street. ‘For the shirt? *Patru franku?* Four francs?’

He pulls out the money and shows it, and the bargain is completed to general satisfaction.

‘Out of the way, out of the way, lads !
Let the general pass !’

A tall young general in a fashionably-cut undress and topboots, and with a riding-whip slung from his shoulder by a strap, passes quickly down the street. A few steps behind him comes an ordinary, a little Asiatic in a bright-coloured robe and turban, with a huge sword and a revolver at his belt. The general, holding his head well up and glancing with cheerful indifference at the soldiers saluting and making way for him, enters one of the hotels. Here Ivan Platonych, Stebelkov and I were sitting in a corner eating some Roumanian dish made of meat and red pepper. The shabby room, with its numerous little tables, was crowded with people. The clatter of plates, the popping of corks, the voices, both drunken and sober, were all drowned by the sound of the band, which was placed in a niche in the room, adorned with red fustian curtains. There were five players ; the two fiddles scraped indefatigably, the violoncello constantly repeated the same thick, monotonous notes, and the contra-bass roared its hardest ; but all these instruments formed a mere foil

for the fifth. In front of the other players sat a dark, curly-haired Hungarian, almost a lad, with a strange instrument, something like the ancient pipes with which Pan and the Fauns are represented, thrust into the wide collar of his velvet jacket. This instrument consists of a row of little wooden pipes of varying sizes, fastened together in such a manner that their open ends are near to the performer's mouth. The Hungarian, turning his head now to one side, now to the other, blew into the pipes, drawing from them melodious and powerful sounds, resembling neither those of the flute nor those of the clarinet. Shaking and turning his head about, he managed to perform the most difficult and complicated antics; the greasy black hair jumped and danced on his head and fell over his brows, his face grew flushed and damp, and the veins stood out on his neck. Evidently, the work was hard. Above the discordant accompaniment of the stringed instruments the sounds of the Pan-pipes rang out, distinct, and, in their wild way, beautiful.

The general placed himself at a table at which some officers of his acquaintance were sitting, bowed to the people who had risen on his entrance, and said aloud:—

‘Sit down, friends! ’

This was addressed to the privates. We

finished dinner in silence; Ivan Platonych then ordered some Roumanian red wine, and after the second bottle, when his face had assumed a cheerful expression, and his cheeks and nose a bright hue, he turned to me and began:—

‘Look here, my lad, tell me. . . . You remember the forced march?’

‘Yes, Ivan Platonych.’

‘You spoke to Wentzel that day?’

‘Yes.’

‘You seized him by the arm?’ the captain asked in a tone of unnatural solemnity.

When I replied that I had, in fact, done so, he uttered a long, loud sigh, and blinked his eyes as though ill at ease.

‘You acted very wrongly . . . very stupidly! . . . You see, it isn’t that I want to reprimand you. . . . You behaved splendidly . . . that is, contrary to discipline. . . . Deuce take it, what rubbish am I talking! You mustn’t take it ill.’ . . .

He broke off, and sat looking at the floor, and puffing. I held my tongue. Ivan Platonych drank off half a glass of wine, and brought his hand down on my knee.

‘Give me your word that you won’t play any more tricks of that kind. I understand how you feel . . . It’s hard for a new

man. . . . But what are you to do with him? He's a regular mad dog, that Wentzel. You see, you' . . .

Ivan Platonych was evidently at a loss for words. He made a long pause, and once more had recourse to his glass.

'What I mean is, you see . . . he's a good fellow in himself. This is a sort of fad he's got, the deuce take it all. . . . You saw yourself I boxed a soldier's ears the other day. Not hard, you know. Well, really, if a blockhead can't understand when he's made a beast of himself . . . no more than a great stupid log, you know. . . . But you see, Vladimir Mikhailych, I'm like a father with them . . . I do it without any ill-feeling, indeed; though, of course, a man does get put out sometimes. But he—he's made a regular system of it. Hi there!' he shouted to the Roumanian waiter, '*bshte vin negru!* Give us some more wine here. . . . And some day he'll get into a court-martial, or if he doesn't it'll be still worse. The men will get savage, and in the first action— . . . And it will be a pity, because, you know, he's really a good fellow after all. He's a warm-hearted fellow even.'

M—m—well,' drawled Stebelkov, 'It's a queer sort of warm-hearted fellow that knocks people about like that.'

‘If you’d seen, Ivan Platonych, what your warm-hearted man did the other day.’ . . .

I told him how Wentzel had beaten the soldier who had smoked.

‘There! There you are; it’s always like that.’ Ivan Platonych reddened, puffed, broke off and began again. ‘But all the same he’s not a brute. Whose men are best fed of the whole lot? Wentzel’s. Whose men are best trained? Wentzel’s. Who hardly ever puts a man under punishment? Who never sends anyone up for trial—unless a man does some regularly scoundrelly thing? Always Wentzel. Really, if it weren’t for this miserable weakness, the soldiers would just worship him.’

‘Have you talked to him about it, Ivan Platonych?

‘Talked to him and quarrelled with him a dozen times over. What can you do with a man like that? “Either an army,” he says “or a militia.” He just invents a lot of stupid phrases. “War is such a cruel thing altogether,” he says, “that, if I’m cruel with the soldiers, that is only a drop in the sea.” . . . “They’re at such a low level of development,” . . . and so on. . . . In fact, such a deuced lot of rubbish! . . . And yet, for all that, he’s a capital fellow. He never drinks, never plays cards, does his work conscientiously, helps his sister and his old mother; and he’s

a first-rate comrade! And then he's a well-educated man! There's not another like him in the regiment. And, mind my words, he'll either come to a court-martial, or *they'll* judge him in their own fashion.' (He nodded in the direction of the window.) 'It's a bad business. That's the fact of the matter, my dear private.'

Ivan Platonych tapped me affectionately on the shoulder; then fumbled in his pocket, pulled out a tobacco-pouch and began to make a fat cigarette. Putting it into a huge amber and silver mouthpiece, with the inscription, 'Cau. Casus' in black, and placing the mouthpiece in his mouth, he silently pushed the tobacco-pouch towards me. We all three began to smoke, and the captain started afresh:—

'Sometimes, really, it is so, there's nothing for it; you *have* to box a man's ears. You see, they're just like children. Do you know Balunov?'

Stebelkov suddenly burst out laughing.

'There, there; shut up, Stebeleok!'^{*} grumbled Ivan Platonych.

'Well, he's an old soldier—a black list man. He's been in the service for nineteen years, and still can't get his discharge; he's

* Affectionate diminutive. Stebeleok means *a little stalk* or *stem*.

always kept on for some misdemeanour or other. Well, this same Balunov, the scamp! . . . It was before you came; just before Kishenev we came through a village, and there was an order from head-quarters to inspect all the men's second pairs of boots. I drew my men up into line, walked behind them and looked whether the tops of the boots were sticking out of the knapsacks. Balunov had none. "Where are your boots?" "I put them in the knapsack for safety, your honour." "Stuff!" "No, indeed, your honour; they're in the knapsack, so they shouldn't get wet!" And the rascal answered so coolly, too! "Take off your knapsack and unstrap it." At that he began to pull the tops of his boots out from under the cover of the knapsack without opening it. "Unstrap it!" "I can get them without, your honour." However, I made him unstrap it; and what do you think? Out of the knapsack he pulls by the ears a live sucking-pig! And if he hadn't got a string tied round its snout, so it shouldn't squeak! There he stood, saluting with his right hand and making the most respectful face you please, and the pig in his left hand! The scamp had stolen it from a Moldavian woman. Well, of course, I had to box his ears a bit that time!'

Stebelkov, in convulsions of laughter, exclaimed in a choked voice:—

‘Yes; and how! Ivanov, he boxed his ears with the pig! . . . Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! . . . He snatched the pig and . . . !’

‘Couldn’t the matter have been arranged without that, Ivan Platonych?’

‘Really, it is quite annoying to hear the way you talk! You wouldn’t have me send him up for court-martial, I suppose?’





VII.

DURING the night of June 14th-15th, Feodorov awakened me.
‘Mikhailych! do you hear?’
‘What?’

‘Firing. They’re crossing the Danube.’

I listened. There was a strong wind driving along the low, black clouds, that hid the moon, rushing against the canvas of our tent, lashing it loudly, howling among the ropes, and whistling shrilly somewhere through the stacks of arms. Through these sounds we could hear from time to time a dull booming.

‘Think what a lot of people are falling now . . .’ whispered Feodorov, sighing. ‘Will they send us there? What do you think? How it rumbles! Just like thunder!’

‘Perhaps it really is only a thunderstorm?’

‘No; that’s no thunderstorm! It’s too regular. Don’t you hear? One after another; one after another!’

The booming was, indeed, quite rhythmical, with regular intervals between the sounds. I slipped out of the tent and looked in the direction from which the noise came; but I could not see the flashes. Sometimes my straining eyes caught, as it were, a glimmer of light in the direction from which the roar of the cannon came, but it was a mere illusion.

‘So it has come at last!’ I thought.

I tried to imagine what must be happening there in the darkness. I saw, in fancy, the broad, black river, with its precipitous banks—utterly unlike the real Danube, as I afterwards saw it. I imagined hundreds of boats upon the water, exposed to this quick regular fire. Would many of them get across unhurt? A cold shiver ran through me. ‘Do you wish you were there?’ I involuntarily asked myself.

I looked at the sleeping camp; all was quiet; through the noise of the wind and the far-off thunder of the cannon I could hear the regular breathing of the soldiers. A sudden, passionate desire arose in me that *all this* should not be; that the march should not come to an end yet, that these peacefully sleeping men, and I among them, should not have to go there where the cannon were roaring.

Sometimes the cannonade grew louder; sometimes I fancied that I could faintly hear other sounds, dull, and not so loud. 'Those are rifle volleys,' I thought, not knowing that we were still more than thirteen miles from the Danube, and that my morbidly excited sense of hearing created these faint sounds of itself. But, though existing only in fancy, these sounds rendered my imagination still more active and called forth terrible pictures. Cries and groans, thousands of falling men, a hoarse, desperate 'hurrah,' a bayonet attack, a general butchery—all passed before me. 'And if they are beaten and it is all for nothing?'

The dark east grew grey, the wind began to die down, the clouds parted, and the fading stars were faintly visible here and there in the pale, greenish sky. It grew lighter; a few men in the camp woke up, and, hearing the sounds of the distant battle, awoke the rest. The men spoke little and softly. The unknown had come near to them; no one knew what would happen to-morrow, and no one cared to think or speak of that to-morrow.

I fell asleep again at dawn, and awoke rather late. The dull booming of the cannon still continued, and, although there was no news from the Danube, rumours, one more incredible than another, began to circulate among us. Some declared that our men had

got across and were chasing the Turks; others that they had not succeeded in crossing, and that whole regiments were destroyed.

‘All that aren’t drowned are shot,’ said someone.

‘Yes, you’re the fellow to make up lies,’ interrupted Vasili Karpych.

‘What should I make up lies for when it’s true?’

‘True, indeed! Who told you?’

‘What?’

‘Why, your truth! Where did you hear it? We all know there’s firing, and that’s all.’

‘Everybody says so. And there’s a Cossack come to the general.’ . . .

‘A Cossack! Did you see him? What’s he like to look at, your Cossack, eh?’

‘Why an ordinary Cossack . . . like a Cossack ought to be’. . . .

‘Yes, ought to be! Your tongue’s an old woman’s night-cap tassel—always wagging—you’d far better hold your jaw. Nobody’s come, and nobody knows anything.’

I went to Ivan Plantonych. The officers were sitting ready and waiting, with their uniforms buttoned up and revolvers in their belts. Ivan Platonych, red, as usual, was puffing and grunting and wiping his neck with a dirty handkerchief. Stebelkov was excited and beaming, and, for some reason, had waxed his

little moustache (which usually hung down), so that it stuck out in two sharp points.

‘Just look at our lieutenant, what a dandy he’s made of himself before going into action !’ said Ivan Platonych, winking in his direction.

‘Ah, Stebeleòchek, Stebeleòchek ! I’m sorry for you ! There won’t be such another pair of moustaches among all the lot of us. They’ll break you, poor little stalk !’ the captain went on, in a comically - mournful tone.

‘Well, lad, are you afraid ?’

‘I’ll try and not be afraid,’ answered Stebelkov, cheerfully.

‘And you, warrior, are you afraid ?’

‘I really don’t know, Ivan Platonych. Is there no news from there ?’

‘No, the Lord knows what’s going on there.’ Ivan Platonych sighed heavily. ‘We start at at one o’clock,’ he added, after a pause.

A fold of the tent was thrown back, and adjutant Lukin’s face appeared, for once serious and pale.

‘Are you here, Ivanov ? I was to bring you up to take the oath. . . . No, not now ; before we start. Ivan Platonych ! I want the fifth packet of cartridges for the men.’

He would not come and sit down, but ran off at once, saying that he had much to do. I, too, went away.

Dinner was ready by twelve o’clock ; but

the men had little appetite. After dinner the order was given to take off the leather protectors from the weapons, and extra cartridges were distributed. The soldiers, preparing for action, began to look over their knapsacks and throw away all unnecessary things. They threw away worn-out shirts and trousers, all sorts of rags, old boots, brushes, greasy barrack books. Some of the men, it appeared, had carried to the Danube in their knapsacks quantities of useless things. I saw on the ground an old *shchelkun* (a kind of wooden block, which in time of peace is used before parades and reviews to smooth the ammunition-straps), heavy stone pomade boxes, little baskets, little planks—even a shoemaker's last.

‘Throw them all away, lads! You'll find it easier in action, and you won't want the things to-morrow.’

‘I've carried it three hundred miles . . . and now what use is it to me?’ soliloquized one soldier, Liutikov, looking at some old rag. ‘I can't take it away with me.’ . . .

To clear out the knapsacks and throw away things became the fashion on that day. When we left the spot where we had halted, it stood out from the dark steppe, an even, parti-coloured square of innumerable rags and odds and ends.

Just before we started, when the regiment,

ready drawn up into form, stood waiting for the word of command, several officers came forwards with our young regimental priest. I and four more volunteers from other battalions were called out of the ranks; we had all entered the regiment during the march. Leaving our arms with our neighbours, we came forward and stood round the standard; my unknown companions were evidently agitated, and I too felt that my heart was beating more strongly than usual.

‘Lay your hands on the standard,’ said the commander.

The ensign lowered the standard, and his assistants took off its case. The old faded strip of green silk fluttered out in the wind; we came up close, and, holding the pole with one hand and raising the other over our heads repeated the words after the priest, who read aloud the ancient military oath of Peter’s days. I thought of the words that Vasili Karpych had quoted at the beginning of our journey; — ‘When are they coming?’ I wondered. At last, after a long list of adventures in the service of his Imperial Majesty, of marches, attacks, van-guards and rear-guards, fortresses, sentries, and baggage-trains, those words came. ‘Caring not for my life,’ we all five repeated aloud with one voice; and, looking at the stern ranks of men pre-

pared for fight, I felt that these were no idle words.

We returned to the ranks ; a little stir and movement went through the regiment ; it formed into a long column and started, at a forced pace, in the direction of the Danube. The sounds of firing stopped.

I remember that march as if it were a dream — the dust raised by the Cossack regiment passing us at a quick trot ; the broad steppe sloping down towards the Danube ; the opposite bank that we saw in the blue distance ten miles away ; the fatigue, the heat, the struggling and fighting for water at the well we passed near Zimnitza ; the dirty little town crowded with troops ; the generals waving their caps to us from a balcony and shouting : 'Hurrah !' and our answering cheer. . . .

'They've crossed ! They've crossed !' shouted voices all around me.

'Two hundred killed, five hundred wounded.'





VIII.

IT was dark by the time we got down the bank, and crossed, by a little bridge, over a strip of the river on to a low-lying, sandy island, still wet from the water which had just trickled away from it. I remember the sharp clashing of the bayonets of soldiers stumbling against one another in the dark ; the dull rattling of the artillery passing us, the black expanse of the wide river, the lights on the opposite bank, to which we were to cross on the morrow, and where, I thought, there would be a new battle. 'I'd better go to sleep and not think,' I decided, and lay down on the sand, which was saturated with water.

When I opened my eyes the sun was already high. Troops, baggage, trains and artillery parks were crowded on the sandy shore ; at the very brink of the water batteries and ditches for the riflemen had been dug

out ; on the high opposite bank of the Danube were gardens and vineyards, swarming with our troops ; beyond these rose the hills, one above the other, sharply cutting off the horizon ; to the right, about two miles from the hills, was Sistovo, with its white houses and minarets standing out against the rising ground. A steamer, with a barge in tow, was taking battalion after battalion across the river. A little torpedo boat was letting off steam close to our shore.

‘Lucky crossing to you, Vladimir Mikhailych,’ said Feodorov, greeting me merrily.

‘The same to you ; but we aren’t across yet.’

‘The steamer is just coming to take us across. They say there’s a Turkish ironclad not far from here, and this little samovar is ready waiting for him, do you see?’ He pointed to the torpedo boat. ‘Ah! Lord help us ; what a lot of poor fellows have been killed !’ he went on, in another tone of voice. ‘If you’d seen them brought, such a lot of them, across the river.’ . . .

He told me the now famous details of the battle of Sistovo.

‘It’s our turn now. When we get across to the other bank the Turks will attack us. . . . All the same we’ve had so much grace ; we’re alive still, but they—’ He

pointed towards a group of soldiers and officers, standing at a little distance from us, round some object which I could not see, and at which they were looking.

‘What is it?’

‘Some of our killed that have been brought back from there. Go and look at them, Mikhailych ; they’re awful !’

I went up to the group of men who stood, silent and bareheaded, looking at the corpses lying side by side on the sand. Ivan Platonych, Stebelkov and Wentzel were there. Ivan Platonych was frowning angrily, puffing and clearing his throat. Stebelkov, with naïve horror, stretched out a slender neck across his shoulder. Wentzel was standing still, in deep absorption.

There were two bodies on the sand. One was a tall, handsome guardsman, of the Finnish regiment, one of that half-battalion of picked men which lost half its number during the attack. He was wounded in the abdomen, and, probably, had suffered long before he died. The pain had left on his face a refining mark of something spiritual, delicate, and tenderly pathetic. His eyes were closed, and his hands folded on his breast. Had he taken that attitude himself in dying, or had his companions cared for him ? His appearance aroused neither horror

nor loathing, only an infinite pity for the overflowing life that had been destroyed.

Ivan Platonych bent over the corpse and, taking up the cap which lay beside the head, read aloud the inscription on the front: 'Ivan Zhurénko, third battalion.' 'He was an Oukrainian, poor fellow,' he said softly. And my home came up before me, with the hot wind in the steppe, the hamlet in the dell, the marshy land overgrown with oziers, the little white cottage with its red shutters. . . . Who is waiting for you there?

The other was a private of the line, belonging to the Volhynian regiment. Death had overtaken him suddenly, while he ran forwards to the attack, frenzied, breathless with shouting; a ball had struck him on the bridge of the nose and had pierced through his head, leaving behind it a yawning black wound. And so he lay, with wide open, fixed eyes, with open mouth and livid face convulsed with fury.

'They've done their share and got their discharge,' said Ivan Platonych. 'They will need nothing more.'

He turned away; the soldiers hurriedly drew aside to let him pass. Stebelkov and I followed him. Wentzel caught us up.

'Well, Ivanov,' he said; 'have you seen them?'

‘Yes, Piotr Nikolaich,’ I answered.

‘What did you think of when you looked at them?’ he asked, gloomily.

There suddenly blazed up in me a feeling of hatred against this cruel man and a desire to say something to hurt him.

‘I thought a good many things. Chiefly that they are not food for powder any longer. They have no more need of order and discipline, and no one will torture them for the sake of discipline any more. They are not soldiers—not subordinates now,’ I added, in a shaking voice; ‘they are *men*!’

Wentzel’s eyes flashed. A sound came from his throat and broke off; probably he was going to answer me, but then restrained himself once more. He walked on beside me, with his head bent down, and, after a few more paces, said, without looking at me:—

‘Yes, Ivanov, you are right. They are men . . . dead men.’





I X.

WE were taken across the Danube, and halted several days near Sistovo, awaiting the Turks ; then the troops, and we among them, moved on towards the heart of the land. For some time we were kept wandering about, now here, now there ; we were close to Tyrnov and not far from Plevna ; but three weeks passed, and still we had not been in action. At last we were joined to a special detachment, whose duty was to prevent an attack from the main body of the Turkish army. Forty thousand of us were spread along a distance of forty-five miles, with about a hundred thousand Turks facing us ; and only the cautiousness of our chief commander in contenting himself with offering resistance to the enemy's attack and not risking his men, together with the languidness of the Turkish army, enabled us to perform our work of preventing the Turks

from forcing a way through and cutting off our main army from the Danube.

We were few in number and our line was long, so we had little time for rest. We passed by numberless villages, appearing now here, now there, to meet some hypothetical attack ; we penetrated into such out-of-the-way parts of Bulgaria that the provision transports could not reach us, and we had to half-starve, making the two-days' rations of biscuits last for five days, or even longer. The famished soldiers pounded up unripe wheat with cudgels on tent-canvas spread out on the ground, and made an odious mixture by boiling it with sour crab-apples. This the men ate (without salt, for we had none), and fell ill in consequence. The battalions melted away, though there was no fighting.

In the middle of July our brigade, with a few cavalry squadrons and two batteries of guns, came to a deserted Turkish village, sacked and half-burnt. Our camp was spread over a high, steep hill ; the village was below us, down in the valley, along which wound a little stream. On the other side of the valley rose high, precipitous rocks. That side was, as we supposed, Turkish ground ; but there were no Turks near. We remained several days on our hill, almost without food, and obtaining water only with great difficulty by

descending to the spring that bubbled out of a rock, far down in the valley. We were completely cut off from the rest of the army and knew nothing of what was happening in the world. Ten miles in front were two or three hundred Cossacks, patrolling a space of thirteen miles.

There were no Turks to be seen there either.

Although we had not succeeded in coming upon the enemy, our little band took all possible precautions. The vanguard stood in a close chain round our camp day and night. The peculiarities of the place made it necessary for the chain to be very long, and every day several companies were engaged in this passive, but very exhausting service. Inactivity, suspense and almost constant hunger was telling heavily upon the men.

The ambulances of the regiment was filled to overcrowding, and every day patients, exhausted with fever and dysentery, were sent off to the far-away division ambulance. In the companies remained only from half to two-thirds of the full number. The men were gloomily discontented and longed to be called to action. That would, at least, be a way out of the position.

At last the moment came. A Cossack rode over to us from the commander of the Cossack squadron, with the news that the Turks had

begun an attack, and that he, the commander, had been obliged to draw in his forces and retreat three miles. It appeared afterwards that the Turks had retired, not intending to follow up the attack, and that we might quite well have stayed where we were, all the more as no orders had come for us to attack. But the general at that time in command of us, who had only lately arrived from St Petersburg, experienced the same feeling as all the men of the detachment. It had become unbearable to sit with folded hands, or stand for days and nights together on guard against an unknown and—as everyone was convinced—non-existent enemy, to starve on bad food, and wait each man his turn to fall ill. All were anxious to join the fighting. The general gave orders for us to advance.

We left half our detachment in the camp. So little was known as to the position of affairs that attacks might be expected from any side. Fourteen companies, the hussars and four cannon started off during the afternoon. We had never marched so quickly and so gladly before, except on the day when we defiled before the Emperor.

Our way lay along the valley, and we passed village after village, some Turkish, some Bulgarian, but all deserted. In the narrow by-ways with their high wattle-fences

that reached above our heads, we met neither man, cattle nor dog ; only the fowls fled clucking to the roofs and fences as we passed, and the geese raised themselves, hissing, clumsily into the air, and tried to fly away. In the gardens hung branches clustered all over with ripe plums of every variety. In the last village, three miles from the spot where the Turks were supposed to be, we were given half-an-hour's rest. The famished soldiers spent the time in shaking down huge quantities of plums, eating some and filling their biscuit-wallets with the rest. A few, though only a few, of the men occupied themselves with catching and killing fowls and geese, which they plucked and took with them. I remembered how those very soldiers, before the crossing at Sistovo, had thrown away all the things they had in their knapsacks, and spoke of it to Zhitkov, who was plucking an enormous goose.

‘Well, Mikhailych, if we haven't been in action, at least we've learned how to wait. I daresay we sha'n't have to fight even now, and nothing 'll come of all this. And if we do get into action, provisions will keep. Supposing we don't get killed, at least we shall have something to eat.’

‘Are you afraid?’ I asked, involuntarily.

‘Well, very likely there won't be any fight-

ing,' he answered, slowly, screwing up his eyes and carefully pulling out what was left of the white down.

‘But if there is?’

‘If there is . . . it doesn’t matter whether you’re afraid or not, you’ve got to go. They don’t ask poor folk like us. Go, and there’s an end of it. Give me your knife; you’ve got a fine knife.’ (I gave him my big hunting-knife, and he divided the goose down the middle and held out one-half to me.) ‘Take it, you may want it . . . and as for all that, whether one’s afraid or whether one isn’t . . . the best thing is not to think about it, sir. It’s all God’s will, and you can’t get away from Him.’

‘If a ball or one of these grenade things comes flying at you, there’s no use trying to get away, that’s true enough!’ assented Feodorov, who was lying beside us.

‘What I think, Vladimir Mikhailych, is that there’s more danger in running away than in stopping where one is. Because you see, according to the trajectory, a ball flies this way’ (he described a curve with his finger), ‘and the very worst of it is just at the rear.’

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘especially with the Turks. It is said that they aim high.’

‘You and your learned jaw!’ said Zhitkov

to Feodorov. 'They'll show you what a trajectory is when you get there! Of course,' he added, after a pause, 'it's best to keep in front . . .'

'With the officers,' said Feodorov; 'you'll see our commander will be in front; he's no coward.'

'Oh yes, ours 'll be in front; he's not afraid. And Nyemtzev 'll be in front too.'

'Uncle Zhitkov,' asked Feodorov, 'what do you think; will he be alive to-night or not?'

Zhitkov dropped his eyes.

'What are you talking about?' he said,

'Why, man, have you seen him? No? Well, he's just shaking all over.'

Zhitkov grew gloomier than ever.

'Don't talk rubbish!' he muttered, sullenly.

'What did you say yourself before we reached the Danube?' asked Feodorov.

'Before the Danube! A man says any sort of stuff when he's put out. 'Tisn't only natural, there was no bearing him! What sort of people do you take the men for—murderers, eh?' Zhitkov turned round as he said this and looked Feodorov straight in the face. 'Do you think they've forgotten God? Don't they know what's before us all? Who knows which of them may be called to answer for himself before the Lord Almighty to-day, and you think they'll have

that in their heads? Before the Danube! Before the Danube I talked of it myself to the gentleman here' (pointing to me);—‘yes, it’s true, I said that too, for it was more than a man could bear to look on at. Have you got nothing better to do than to remember what happened before the Danube?’

He began fumbling in his top-boots for his tobacco pouch, and all the while he filled and smoked his pipe, kept muttering and grumbling to himself. Finally, he put away the tobacco pouch, settled himself in a comfortable attitude, clasping his knees with both arms, and sank into a brown study.

Half-an-hour later we left the village, and began to mount uphill. Beyond the rising ground which we had to cross were the Turks. We reached the summit of the hill, and a broad stretch of broken ground, gradually sloping downwards, spread out before us, covered here with wheat and maize fields, there, with huge thickets of elms and medlar trees. In two spots shone white minarets; but the villages to which they belonged were hidden behind green hillocks. It was the right-hand village that we were to seize. Beyond it, on the horizon, was a barely visible white band; it was the high road which our Cossacks had just retired from occupying. Soon the whole scene was hidden from our

eyes, for we entered a dense thicket, broken here and there by little glades.

I cannot distinctly remember the beginning of the battle. When we came out on to the open ground at the hilltop, where our companies, emerging from the bushes, and forming into a long chain, were plainly visible to the Turks, we heard the sudden thunder of a cannon-shot. They had fired a grenade at us. Our men started, and all eyes turned to the already fading cloudlet of white smoke creeping down the hillside. At that moment the sharp whizzing sound of the approaching missile made everyone shrink back. It seemed to fly right over our heads; then struck into the ground close beside the company which was marching behind us. I remember the hollow sound of the explosion and the piteous cry that followed. A fragment of the grenade had torn off the leg of a sergeant. This I heard afterwards; but, at the time, I could not understand the cry; my ear received the sound mechanically, and that was all. Everything was swallowed up in that vague feeling, which no words can express, that seizes upon a man the first time he goes under fire. It is said that everyone is afraid in battle; that every truthful and modest man, if asked whether he is afraid, will answer 'yes.' But this fear

was not the physical terror which takes possession of a man when he meets a robber in a lonely lane by night ; it was a full, distinct consciousness of the closeness, the inevitability of death. And, strange as the words sound, this consciousness neither held our men back nor made them think of flight, but led them on. There was no awakening of blood-thirsty instincts, no desire to press forwards in order to kill anyone ; but an irresistible impulse to go forwards at any cost ; and the thought in our minds of what we had to do was not—‘We must kill,’ but, rather ‘We must die.’

We had to cross an open glade, and the Turks took the opportunity to fire several shots at us. Between us and them was now only one large thicket, sloping gradually upwards to the village. We entered into the brushwood, and all grew still.

It was difficult walking ; the tall, often thorny, bushes grew close together, and we had to get round them or force a passage through them. The company of riflemen, which was in front of us, had split up into a chain, and the men softly called to one another every now and then in order not to get separated. Our company, for the present, kept together. Deep silence reigned in the wood.

Suddenly the first rifle-shot rang out, not very loud, like the sound of a wood-cutter's axe. The Turks began to fire at random in our direction. The balls whistled high in the air in varying notes, and flew noisily through the bushes, tearing off boughs as they passed, but touching no one. The sounds of the breaking boughs grew more and more frequent, till they blended in one continuous crash. We could no longer hear the whistling and hissing of individual balls, the whole air hissed and whistled. We pressed hastily forwards; all near me were unhurt, and I myself was unhurt. This surprised me greatly.

The thicket broke off suddenly, and a deep ravine with a brook ran across the way. We stopped for a moment to rest and drink water.

At this spot the companies were separated, in order that they might fall upon the Turkish forces from both flanks; our company was left in the ravine, as a reserve. The riflemen were to go straight on, and, passing through the bushes, force their way into the village. The Turkish volleys were still crashing, as frequently as before, but louder.

Wentzel, on reaching the top of the ravine on the opposite side, drew up his forces into form. He said something to the men, which I did not catch.

'We'll do our best,' answered the voices of the riflemen.

I looked up at him; he was pale, and, I thought, sad, but fairly calm. Catching sight of Ivan Platonych and Stebelkov he waved his handkerchief to them, and then turned his eyes to our company, evidently looking for something. I guessed that he wanted to take leave of me, and stood up that he might see me. He smiled, nodded to me several times, and commanded his company to form into a chain. The men separated to right and left in groups of four, drew out into a long chain and, in one moment, disappeared among the bushes; all except one man, who suddenly drew himself up violently, flung up his hands and dropped heavily on the ground. Two of our men ran out of the ravine and brought in the body.

Half-an-hour passed in weary suspense.

The battle grew hotter. The sounds of the volleys became more and more frequent, and then melted into one terrific roar. The cannon began to thunder on the right flank. Bloodstained men, walking or crawling, came out of the bushes; at first there were only a few of them, but with every moment their number increased. Our men helped them down into the ravine, gave them water, and laid them down to wait till the ambulance

people should come with litters. A rifleman, with one hand torn into rags, and a face livid with pain and loss of blood, came without any help, but groaning and rolling his eyes fearfully, and sat down by the brook. Our men bound his arm up and laid him on a cloak; the bleeding stopped. He was shaking with fever; his lips were quivering and he burst out sobbing convulsively, with a nervous catching of the breath.

‘Mates . . . mates! . . . Oh my lads!’ . . .

‘Many killed?’

‘Oh, so many—so many!’

‘Is the commander hurt?’

‘Not yet. If it weren’t for him they’d have driven us back. Ours will win . . . they’ll win with him,’ said the wounded man, faintly. ‘He led us up three times, and they drove us back. Now he’s charged again . . . the fourth time. . . . They’re in the bivouac . . . their cartridges . . . oh . . . it’s just raining bullets! . . . No!’ he cried out with sudden fierceness, half rising and gesticulating with his wounded hand; ‘you sha’n’t get off so! . . . You sha’n’t, damn you!’

The man rolled his eyes frantically, shrieked out a horrible, brutal oath, and fell back insensible.

Lukin appeared at the top of the ravine.
'Ivan Platonych!' he shouted in a voice
not like his own; 'bring up your men.'

Smoke, thundering crashes, moans, a
frenzied 'Hurrah!' . . . the stench of
blood and powder . . . Strange, un-
known, white-faced people wrapped in smoke
. . . A horrible, inhuman butchery . . .
God be thanked that such moments are re-
membered but dimly, as through a mist!

When we came up Wentzel was leading
what remained of his company for a fifth
charge against the Turkish hail of bullets.
That time the riflemen succeeded in forcing
their way into the village. Not many of the
Turks defending the spot had time to escape.
The second company of riflemen lost, during
two hours fighting, *fifty-two* men out of a little
over a hundred; our company, which took
only a small part in the action, had few
losses.

We did not remain in occupation of the
position gained, although the Turks were
completely routed. When our general saw
battalion after battalion, with masses of
cavalry and long trains of cannon, come out
upon the high road, he was horror-stricken at

their numbers. Evidently the Turks had not known what forces we had, as we were hidden by the bushes ; had they guessed that a mere fourteen battalions had driven them from the deep-cut roads, gullies and high fences surrounding the village, they would have come back and crushed us. Their numbers were three times greater than ours.

By evening we were back again at our old quarters. Ivan Platonych called me in to tea.

‘Have you see Wentzel?’ he asked.

‘Not yet.’

‘Go into his tent and make him come here, will you? The man’s breaking his heart. “Fifty-two! Fifty-two!” that’s all we can get out of him. Do go to him.’

Wentzel’s tent was dimly lit up by one scrap of candle. He was crouching down in a corner, with his head laid on an old box, and sobbing bitterly.



A COWARD.



A COWARD.



HE war simply will not give me any peace. I see plainly that it is going to drag on, and when it will end is very difficult to say.

Our soldiers remain the same wonderful soldiers that they always were, but the enemy turns out to be by no means so feeble as was supposed, and now it is four months since the declaration of war and still our side has had no positive success. And yet every needless day carries off hundreds of lives. I don't know whether it comes from the way my nerves are made, but the war telegrams giving the number of killed and wounded produce on me a much stronger impression than on other people. Others will quietly read out,— 'Our losses are insignificant; such-and-such officers are wounded, fifty privates killed, and one hundred wounded,' and will even be glad

that the number is so small ; but when I read such an announcement, a whole bloody picture comes up before my eyes. Fifty corpses—a hundred mutilated human beings—that is an 'insignificant' thing ! Why are we so horrified when we read in the papers of some murder case in which three or four persons have fallen victims ? Why is it that the sight of corpses riddled with bullets, lying on a battle-field, does not strike us with the same horror as the sight of the interior of a house, ravaged by a murderer ? Why did all Russia cry out at the catastrophe of the Tiligul embankment, which killed several dozen persons, when no one takes any notice of the vanguard skirmishes with their 'insignificant' losses—also of several dozen lives?

A few days ago, Lvov, a medical student friend of mine, with whom I often argue about the war, said to me :—

'Ah, well, you lover of peace, we shall see how you'll carry out your philanthropic theories when they take you for a soldier and you yourself will have to shoot people.'

'They won't take me, Vasili Petròvich ; I am entered in the reserve.'

'But if the war goes on they'll take the reserve too. Don't be too sure—your turn will come.'

My heart sank. How was it that this

thought did not come into my head before? Indeed, they may take the reserve; there is nothing impossible in that. 'If the war goes on' . . . and it is sure to go on. Even if this war does not go on long, another will begin. Why should we not fight? Why should we not do great things? It seems to me that the present war is only the beginning of future wars, from which neither I, nor my little brother, nor my sister's baby son shall escape. And my turn will come very soon. Where is one's *ego* to go to? You protest with all the force of your being against war, and yet war forces you to take a rifle on your shoulder and go to kill and be killed. But no, that is impossible! I, a peaceable, inoffensive young man, who up till now have known only my books, the lecture-hall, my own family and a few friends; who hoped to begin other work in a year or two—a labour of love and truth—I, that have been accustomed to look at the world objectively, to set it before me, thinking that everywhere in this world I understand the evil and, by understanding it, can avoid it; I see all my castle of tranquillity fallen into ruin, and myself putting on to my shoulders that very garment, at the stains and rents of which I was just looking. And no degree of culture, no knowledge of myself and of the world, no spiritual liberty,

can give me this petty physical liberty—the liberty to dispose of my own body.

Lvov makes fun of me when I begin explaining to him my horror of war.

'Look at things more simply, my dear fellow,' says he; 'you'll find life an easier job so. Do you think this butchering business has any charms for me? Why, it does me a personal mischief as well; it won't let me study properly. They've hurried up the medical course, so as to send us to chop off arms and legs. All the same, I don't spend my time on useless theorizing about the horrors of war, because, however much I may think, I can't do anything to put a stop to it. Really, it's better to leave off thinking and just do one's business. And if they send me out to look after the wounded, I shall go and look after them. What would you have? In a time like this a man's self must be sacrificed. By-the-bye, do you know, my sister Masha is going as a sister of mercy?'

'No, really?'

'She decided the day before yesterday, and to-day she's gone to learn bandaging. I didn't try to dissuade her; I only asked what she thinks of doing about her studies, and she said:—"I'll finish afterwards, if I'm

alive." She's quite right; let the girl go and learn something real.'

'And what about Kùzma Fòmich?'

'Kùzma holds his tongue, he's only got as sullen as a bear with a sore head, and left off working altogether. I'm glad for his sake that my sister's going away, for the man is simply off his head; he's perfectly miserable; he can't work; he just dangles after her like her shadow. Oh, this precious love!' Vasili Petròvich shook his head. 'He's gone off to escort her home, as if the girl hadn't always gone about the streets by herself!'

'It seems to me, Vasili Petròvich, that it is a pity he lives with you.'

'Of course it is, but who could foresee this? The flat is too big for me and my sister alone; there was a spare room, and why shouldn't we let a good fellow take it? And then, of course, the good fellow must go and tumble over head and ears in love. To say the truth, I can't help being a bit put out with her too; which way is Kùzma worse than she is? He's kind, and no fool, and a jolly good fellow altogether. And she takes no more notice than if he weren't there.'

'Well, this is all very fine, but get along out of my room; I'm in a hurry. If you

want to see my sister and Kùzma, wait in the dining-room ; they'll soon come.'

'No, Vasili Petròvich, I'm in a hurry too. Good-bye.'

Just as I got out into the street, I saw Mårya Petròvna and Kùzma. They were walking silently—Mårya Petròvna in front with a certain forced concentration about the expression of her face, and Kùzma a little behind her on one side, as though afraid to walk close beside her, every now and then glancing furtively at her face. They passed without seeing me.

I can neither do anything, nor think of anything. I have read the account of the third battle of Plevna. There are twelve thousand killed and wounded on the Russian and Roumanian side alone, Turks not counted. . . . Twelve thousand. . . . The number floats before my eyes in figures, or stretches out before me in an endless row of corpses lying side by side. If they were laid shoulder to shoulder they would form a road five miles long. . . . What sort of thing is this ?

I have been told something about Skobelev, that he charged somewhere, attacked something, took some redoubt, or else it was taken from him—I forget. Of all this fearful busi-

ness I remember and see only one thing—a mountain of corpses, serving as pedestal to some grand events, which will be chronicled in the pages of history. Maybe this is necessary; I do not take upon myself to judge, and, indeed, cannot do so; I have no views about the war, nothing but a *feeling* of revolt against the shedding of this sea of blood. A bull, before whose eyes other bulls like himself are slaughtered, feels, in all probability, something of the kind. . . . He does not understand of what use his death can be, and only looks at the blood with staring eyes of horror, and bellows despairingly in a heartrending voice.

Am I a coward or no?

I was told to-day that I am a coward. I was told so, it is true, by a very silly person, in whose presence I had expressed a dread of being taken for a soldier, and an aversion to the idea of going to the war. Her opinion in no way distressed me, but it raised in my mind the question:—Am I not indeed a coward? Possibly all my sense of revolt against the thing that everyone counts so great results from fear for my own skin? And really, is it worth while to trouble about some one trifling life, in face of a great cause? And am I capable of exposing my life to

risk at all, for the sake of any cause whatever?

I did not brood over these questions for long. I looked back over all my life, all those occasions—it is true that they are not many—on which I have found myself face to face with danger, and I could not charge myself with cowardice. I did not fear for my life then, and do not fear for it now. It is, therefore, not death which terrifies me.

Always new battles, new deaths and miseries. After reading the papers I am unable to set about anything; the letters in my book seem like rows of fallen men; my pen is a weapon, making black wounds on the white paper. If it goes on this way I shall really come to actual hallucinations. However, just now I have got a new care, which, to some extent, distracts my attention from the one tyrannous thought.

Yesterday evening I went to the Lvovs', and found them at tea. The brother and sister were sitting at the table, and Kùzma was tramping quickly up and down the room, pressing his hand to his face, which was swollen and tied up with a handkerchief.

'What is the matter with you?' I asked.

He made no answer, except a gesture of his hand, and continued tramping up and down.

'He got a toothache, and then his face swelled up and a great abcess came,' said Mårya Petrovna. 'I asked him to go to the doctor in time, but he wouldn't, and now you see what it's come to.'

'The doctor will be here in a minute; I went to fetch him,' said Vasili Petrovich.

'Worth while!' muttered Kùzma between his teeth.

'Of course its worth while, when you may get subcutaneous extravasation! And there you will keep on walking about, although I've begged you to go to bed. You know how these things sometimes end.'

'Doesn't matter however it ends,' muttered Kùzma.

'It matters very much, Kùzma Fòmich; don't talk nonsense,' said Mårya Petrovna, softly.

These words were enough to smooth Kùzma down. He even seated himself at the table and asked for some tea. Mårya Petrovna poured it out and handed it to him. When he took the glass from her hand, his face assumed an expression of absolute rapture, which was so out of character with the grotesquely swollen cheek that I could not keep from smiling. Lvov, too, laughed; only Mårya Petrovna looked at Kùzma gravely and pityingly.

The doctor presently arrived. He was a very merry fellow, as fresh and bright as a juicy apple. When he examined the patient's neck, his usually jovial face became troubled.

'Let us go into your room; I want to examine you thoroughly.'

I followed them into Kùzma's room. The doctor made him lie down on the bed and began to examine the upper part of his chest, cautiously touching it with his fingers.

'Well, now, you will have the kindness to lie there quiet and not get up. Have you any friends who would be willing to sacrifice a little of their time for your benefit?' asked the doctor.

'I think so,' answered Kùzma, in a hesitating tone.

'I would ask them,' said the doctor, graciously, turning to me, 'to watch by the patient day and night, and, if anything new should occur, to send for me.'

He left the room. Lvov went to the door with him, and they talked together a long time under their breath. I went to Màrya Petròvna. She was sitting in a thoughtful attitude, leaning her head on one hand and slowly stirring her tea with the other.

'The doctor says someone must sit up with Kùzma.'

‘Can there really be any danger?’ asked Mårya Petròvna, anxiously.

‘Probably there is; else why should he have to be watched? You will help to nurse him, Mårya Petròvna?’

‘Oh; of course! There, you see, I haven’t gone to the war yet, and I have to be sister of mercy already. Let us go to him; it must be very dull for him to lie alone.’

Kùzma greeted us with a smile, somewhat impeded by the swollen cheek.

‘That’s good of you,’ he said; ‘I began to think you had forgotten me.’

‘No, Kùzma Fòmich; we won’t forget you now; someone will sit up with you. You see, that is what comes of wilfulness,’ said Mårya Petròvna, smiling.

‘And will you?’ asked Kùzma, timidly.

‘Yes, yes; only you must obey me!’

Kùzma shut his eyes and blushed with delight.

‘Ah, yes!’ he said suddenly, turning to me, ‘give me the looking-glass, please; there it is, on the table.’

I handed him the little round looking-glass; Kùzma asked me to hold the light, and examined the swollen place in the looking-glass. After this his face grew dark, and, though we all three tried to amuse him with conversa-

tion, he did not utter a single word the whole evening through.

To-day I was told positively that the reserve will soon be called out. I expected this, and was not much affected by the news.

I could escape the fate I dread so much; I might take advantage of my acquaintance with certain influential persons, and remain in St Petersburg as a state servant. My friends would 'get me a berth' here, if only as clerk. But, in the first place, it would disgust me to resort to such means, and, in the second place, *something*, that I cannot define, sits inside of me, judges my case, and forbids me to escape from the war. 'It's not right,' says this inner voice to me.

Something has happened that I in no way expected.

This morning I came here to take Mårya Petròvna's place at Kùzma's bedside. She met me at the door, pale, tired out with her sleepless night, and with traces of tears about her eyes.

'What is the matter, Mårya Petròvna, what is it?'

'Hush! Speak softly, please,' she whispered. 'Do you know . . . it's all over.'

'All over!' Why, he can't be dead?'

'No, not yet . . . only there's no hope. Both doctors . . . We called in another . . .'

She could not speak for tears.

'Go in . . . look . . . let's go to him.'

'Dry your eyes first and drink some water, or you will upset him altogether.'

'It's all the same. . . . Do you think he doesn't know? He knew yesterday, when he asked for the looking-glass; you know, he would soon have been a doctor himself.'

The heavy smell of a dissecting theatre filled the room where the sick man lay. His bed was moved out into the middle of the room. His large figure, long legs and arms, lying straight at his sides, were sharply outlined on the counterpane. His eyes were shut, and his breathing was slow and laboured. It seemed to me that he had grown thin in one night; his face had taken an ominous earthy look, and was damp and clammy.

'What has happened to him?' I asked in a whisper.

'He will tell you. . . . Stop with him . . . I can't . . .'

She went away, covering her face with her hands and shaking with suppressed sobs, and I sat down beside the bed and waited for Kuzma to wake. There was dead silence in

the room ; only the watch, lying on a table by the bed, ticked out its little song, and the patient breathed slowly and heavily. I looked at his face and could hardly recognise it ; not that his features were much changed, but I saw him in an altogether new light. I had known Kùzma and been on friendly terms with him for a long time (though there had been no special intimacy between us), but I had never before had occasion to enter into his position as now. I now looked back over his life, his joys and disappointments, as if they had been my own. Up till now I had seen principally the comic side of his love for Mårya Petròvna ; but now I realised how much this man must have suffered. 'Is it possible,' I thought, 'that he is in so much danger? It cannot be. How can a man die of a ridiculous toothache? Mårya Petròvna is crying for him ; he will get well and all will go right.'

He opened his eyes and saw me. Without any change in the expression of his face, he began to speak, slowly, pausing after each word.

'Good morning. . . . You see . . . it's all up with me. The end has come. It has stolen on me . . . so suddenly . . . stupid . . .'

'Tell me, Kùzma, what on earth has hap-

pened to you? Perhaps it's not so bad after all.'

"Not bad," you say? No, my lad, it's bad enough. No mistaking trifles of this kind. There, look!'

Slowly, methodically, he drew back the bed-clothes and unfastened his shirt. The intolerable stench of a corpse suddenly filled my nostrils. For a handsbreadth, beginning from the neck, the right side of Kùzma's chest was black, like black velvet, covered with a faint bluish shade. It was gangrene.

It is four days since I have closed my eyes. I have been watching constantly by the sick man's bed, now with Màrya Petróvna, now with her brother. It seems as though life hardly lingered on in him and yet could not leave the strong body. The piece of black, dead flesh was cut out and thrown away, and the doctor ordered us to wash the great wound, left by the operation, every two hours. Every two hours, therefore, two, or sometimes all three of us, go to Kùzma's bed, turn and lift his great figure, lay bare the frightful wound and wash it with carbolic acid and water, syringed through a gutta-percha tube. The water sprays in the wound, and, Kùzma sometimes even finds strength to smile, 'because,' as he explains, 'it tickles.' Like

all persons who are seldom ill, he delights in being nursed and waited on like a child, and when Mårya Petòvna takes in her hands what he calls 'the reins of goverment,' *i.e.*, the gutta-percha tube, and sprinkles the wound, he is greatly pleased, and says that no one can do it so beautifully as she, although her hand often shakes with emotion and splashes the water all over the bed.

How their relation to one another has changed! Mårya Petòvna, who used to be for Kùzma something unapproachable, that he was afraid to look at, who used to take no notice of his existence, now often weeps in silence as she sits by his bed when he is asleep, and nurses him devotedly; while he composedly accepts her care, as his due, and talks to her like a father to a little daughter.

At times he suffers very much. His wound burns, he shakes all over with fever. . . . At such moments strange thoughts come into my head. Kùzma seems to me a unit—one of those who form the tens of thousands mentioned in the war reports. By his illness and his suffering I try to measure the evil caused by the war. So much pain and sorrow here, in one room, on one bed, in one breast; and all this is but a drop in the sea of misery and anguish suffered by the

huge mass of men who are sent forward, brought back and laid upon the fields in bloodstained heaps of bodies, some dead, others still moving and groaning.

I am utterly worn out with miserable thoughts and want of sleep. I must ask Lvov or Mårya Petròvna to take my place for a bit and let me get to sleep, if only for two hours.

I slept like the dead, curled up on the little sofa, and was waked by someone shaking me by the shoulder.

'Get up! Get up!' said Mårya Petròvna.

I sprang up, and for a moment could understand nothing. Mårya Petròvna was whispering something in a quick, terrified way.

'Spots! New spots!' I made out at last.

'What spots? Where?'

'Oh, he doesn't understand anything! Kùzma Fòmich has got new spots! I've sent for the doctor already.'

'Perhaps it doesn't matter,' said I, with the indifference of a man just waked from sleep.

'Doesn't matter! Look yourself!'

Kùzma lay with his head thrown back, sleeping heavily and restlessly. He tossed his head from side to side, and sometimes moaned in his sleep. His chest was bare

and I saw upon it, a little way below the bandage covering the wound, two small, new, black spots. The gangrene had crept on downwards under the skin, spread, and now come out in two places. Although I had not had from the beginning much hope of Kùzma's recovery, these new and certain signs of death made me turn cold.

Màrya Petròyna sat in a corner of the room, her hands resting on her knee, and looked at me with despairing eyes.

There is no need to quite despair, Màrya Petròyna. The doctor will come and look, perhaps it is not quite final. We may pull him through after all.'

'No, we shall not pull him through; he will die,' she whispered.

'Well, he will die,' I answered, as softly; 'for all of us, of course, that is a great misfortune, but you must not take it so terribly to heart; you have grown to look like a corpse in these last days.'

'If you knew what misery I have suffered in these days! I cannot explain to myself why it is so. I did not love him, you know, and I don't think I love him even now as he loves me; but if he dies it will break my heart! Everything will bring back to me his steady gaze, his constant silence whenever I was present, though he liked talking,

and talked well. There will always be a reproach on my conscience, that I did not pity him, did not appreciate his intellect, his heart, his affection. Perhaps it will seem absurd to you, but I am constantly tormented by the thought that, if I had loved him, we should have lived quite differently, everything would have been different, and this ridiculous, frightful thing would never have happened. I think and think, and try to justify myself, but something within me always keeps on saying, "It's my fault, my fault, my fault!"

I glanced at the patient, fearing that our whispering would wake him, and saw a change in his face. He had awakened and heard what Mårya Petròvna said, but did not wish her to know it. His lips quivered, his cheeks flushed, his face suddenly lighted up, as a dull, rain-soaked meadow lights up when the clouds that overhang it part and let the sun peep through. No doubt he forgot his sickness and the terror of death; one feeling only filled his heart, and overflowed in two great tears from under the closed and quivering lids. Mårya Petròvna looked at him for a few seconds in a startled way; then a tender look came into her face, and blushing, she bent down over the poor half-corpse, and kissed him.

He opened his eyes.

‘My God, I don’t want to die !’ he murmured.

Suddenly I heard a strange, low, sobbing sound, quite new to me, for I had never before seen this man weep.

I went out of the room. I was nearly ready to blubber myself.

I, too, do not want to die, and all these thousands do not want to die. Kùzma, at least, has found a consolation at the last moment, but there? Kùzma, in spite of physical suffering and the terror of death, experiences such a feeling that I doubt whether he would give up these moments for any others in all his life. No, this is quite another thing! Death will always be death; but to die among loving friends, or to die grovelling in the dirt, in your own blood, expecting every moment that someone will come and finish you, or that the cannon will drive over you and crush you like a worm

‘I tell you, frankly,’ said the doctor to me, as he put on his cloak and galoshes in the hall; ‘ninety-nine out of a hundred of such cases under hospital treatment die. I place my hope only in the very careful nursing, the remarkably cheerful mood of the patient, and his intense desire to recover:

‘Every patient wishes to recover, doctor.’

‘Certainly; but, in your friend’s case, there are peculiar circumstances to increase that desire,’ said the doctor, with a smile. ‘Well; to-day we’ll operate again. We will make a new aperture and put in drainage-tubes, so that the water may flow better; and we won’t lose hope.’

He shook hands with me, threw on his bear-skin cloak, and drove off to visit his other patients. In the evening he returned with his instruments.

‘Perhaps you, my future colleague, would like to perform the operation for practice?’ he said to Lvov.

Lvov nodded his head, pulled up his sleeves, and, with a grave and gloomy expression of face, set to work. I saw how he put into the wound an astonishing instrument with a triple point, how the points cut into the flesh, and how Kùzma clenched his hands into the bedclothes and ground his teeth with pain.

‘There; don’t be an old woman,’ gloomily said Lvov, inserting the drainage-tube in the new wound.

‘Is it very painful?’ asked Mårya Petòvna, gently.

‘Not so bad, dear; only I’ve got weak and worn out.’

The bandages were put on, Kùzma was made to drink some wine, and became calm ; the doctor drove away, Lvov went into his room to study, and Mårya Petróvna and I began setting the sick-room to rights.'

'Put the coverlet straight,' said Kùzma, in a soundless, even voice ; 'there's a draft.'

I began smoothing his pillows and coverlet, according to his own instructions, which he gave very captiously, assuring me that somewhere near his left elbow there was a little hole through which a draft came, and asking me to tuck the clothes closer round him. I tried to do it as well as possible, but, in spite of all my efforts, Kùzma still felt a draft, now at his side, now at his feet.

'You're so clumsy,' he muttered softly. 'Now there's a draft at my back again. Let her do it.'

He glanced at Mårya Petróvna, and it became quite clear to me why I could not satisfy him.

Mårya Petróvna set down the medicine-glass she was holding, and went up to the bedside.

'The coverlet ?'

'Yes ; set it straight . . . that's right . . . nice and warm !'

He watched her while she smoothed the coverlet ; then shut his eyes and fell asleep

with an expression of childlike delight on his worn face.

‘Are you going home?’ asked Mårya Petòvna.

‘No; I’ve had a good sleep and can sit up; but, if you don’t need me, I may as well go.’

‘Don’t go, please; let’s talk a little. My brother is always at his books, and it is so sad, so bitter to sit alone with our patient when he sleeps and think of his death.’

‘You must be firm, Mårya Petòvna; sad thoughts and tears are forbidden to sisters of mercy.’

‘And I shall not cry when I am a sister of mercy. After all, it will be much less hard to nurse the wounded than a man that is so dear to one.’

‘Then you are really going?’

‘Of course. Whether he dies or whether he recovers, I shall go in any case. I have got accustomed to the idea and cannot give it up. I want a good cause, I want to have some good days, full of light, to look back upon.’

‘Ah, Mårya Petòvna, I am afraid you will find no light at the war.’

‘Why not? I will work; there is light for you. I want to take part in the war in some way—in any way.’

‘To take part in it! Does it rouse no horror in you? *You* to say such a thing!’

‘Yes, I. Who told you that I *like* the war? Only . . . how shall I put it? . . . War is evil, and you and I and very many people hold that opinion, but it is inevitable. Whether you like it or whether you don’t, it will be all the same, and if you do not go to fight, someone else will be taken and a man will be mutilated or worn out with the march just the same. I am afraid you don’t understand me. I express myself badly. I mean this,—I think that the war is a *general* misfortune, a *general* pain, and to evade it may be excusable, but I do not like the idea.’

I kept silence. Mårya Petròvna’s words put into clearer form my dim aversion to the idea of evading military service. I myself *felt* what she both felt and thought, only I *thought* differently.

‘You, I believe, constantly think of how you can manage to stop here,’ she went on, ‘supposing you should be taken for a soldier. My brother has told me so. You know I am ery fond of you, and think well of you, but his trait in you does not please me.’

‘What would you have, Mårya Petròvna? Different opinions. Why should I be answerable? I didn’t begin the war.’

‘Neither you, nor any of the people who have died and will die in it began it. They, too, would not go if they could help it, but they cannot get out of it, and you can. They go to fight, and you will stay in St Petersburg, alive, well and happy, only because you have acquaintances who are sorry to send a man they personally know to the war. I do not take upon myself to judge; perhaps this is excusable, but I do not like it—no.’

She relapsed into silence with an energetic shake of her curly head.

At last it has come. To-day I put on the grey cloak, and began the elementary training—the rifle practice. The words of command still ring in my ears,—

‘Steady! Form into li-i-ine! At-ten-tion! Advance arms! ’

And I stood steady, and formed into line, and clanked with my rifle as I was told. In a short time, when I attain to sufficient wisdom in the matter of forming into line, I shall be entered into some party of soldiers, and we shall be put into trains and taken by rail, and then divided among the regiments, to fill up the places left vacant by the killed...

Ah, well, well, what does it matter! Everything is over; now I no longer belong to myself, I float with the stream. The best thing

now is not to think, not to argue, but just accept all the chances of life, and, perhaps, howl a bit when one is hurt. . . .

I have been put into a special division of the barracks for men of the privileged classes. It is distinguished by having beds instead of sleeping benches, but it is, nevertheless, fairly dirty. The place for the non-privileged recruits is altogether insufferable. Until they are distributed among the various regiments, they live in a huge barn, which used to be a horse-training ground. It has been divided up by horizontal partitions into two storeys, after which straw has been brought in, and the place simply left to its temporary inhabitants to domicile themselves how they can. The pathway down the middle is filled with snow and dirt, brought in by the boots of the people constantly entering. This has got mixed with the straw, and form an indescribable slough. The rest of the straw is dirty enough, too. Several hundred men sit, stand, and lie on it, those from the same district collecting together in groups—in fact, a complete ethnographical exhibition. I, too, sought out the people from my native district. The tall, clumsy Oukrainians, in their new jenkins and lamb's-wool caps, were lying silently, huddled up together. There were about ten of them.

‘Good morning, neighbours.’

‘Good morning.’

‘Been here long?’

‘‘Bout a fortnight. And who may you be?’ asked one of them.

I told him my name, which I found to be familiar to all of them. They were somewhat enlivened by meeting a neighbour, and began to talk.

‘Are you home-sick?’ I asked.

‘How can a fellow help being home-sick?’
It’s dreary work! If they’d even feed one properly, but there’s no bearing the stuff they give you.’

‘And where are you to go now?’

‘And who the deuce knows that? To the Turks, I s’pose.’

‘Do you want to go to the war?’

‘There’s nothing much to see there.’

I began to make inquiries about our native town, and the recollection of home loosened their tongues. They told me of the latest wedding, to celebrate which two oxen had been sold, and of how the bridegroom was taken for a soldier directly afterwards; of the police-sergeant (‘may a hundred devils ride down his throat’); of how there was so little land remaining that several hundred persons had started this year from the village of Markòvka for the Amur. . . . The conver-

sation was confined entirely to the past; of the future, of the labours, dangers and sufferings that await us all, no one spoke. Not a man cared to know anything about Turks or Bulgarians or the cause for which he was going to die.

A tipsy little soldier of the town command stopped, as he passed in front of our group, and, when I again started the subject of the war, announced authoritatively,—

‘That Turk ought to be thrashed.’

‘Ought to be?’ I repeated, involuntarily smiling at the positiveness of his decision.

‘Yes, indeed, sir,—his very name shouldn’t be left, the heathen scoundrel? ‘Cause why? See what a lot we have to put up with all along of him not keeping quiet! Now, if he’d behave, so to say, properly and nicely, and not make a fuss, I should be at home now with my father and mother, and a long sight better off. But he kicks up a row, and we come to grief over it! It’s the truth I’m saying, you may take my word for it. Won’t you give me a cigarette, sir?’ he suddenly broke off, standing in position before me, and touching his cap in military fashion.

I gave him a cigarette, took leave of my neighbours, and went home, as it was my off-duty time.

'He kicks up a row, and we come to grief over it,' rang in my ears the tipsy voice. Short and clumsy as it is, we cannot get beyond this little sentence.

There is sorrow and despondency at the Lvovs'. Kùzma is in a very bad state, although his wound is now clear of gangrene ; he lies delirious, moaning, with a frightfully high temperature. The brother and sister have been constantly with him during all the days that I have been occupied with entering the service and learning the discipline. Now that they know I am going, the sister is sadder than ever, and the brother gloomier.

'In uniform already !' he muttered, when I shook hands with him in the room, littered with books and filled with tobacco-smoke, in which he works.—'Oh, you people, you people! . . .'

'What sort of people are we, Vasili Petróvich ?'

'You won't let me study—that's what sort you are ! As it is there's not time enough ; they won't let me finish my course because they want to send me to the war ; as it is, I shall not know heaps of things—and now you and Kùzma . . .'

'Well, Kùzma's dying, that's true ; but what have I done ?'

‘Dear me, and aren’t you dying? If they don’t kill you, you’ll go mad or put a bullet through your head. Do you suppose I don’t know you, and do you suppose there have been no instances?’

‘What instances? Do you know of any such cases? Tell me, Vasili Petròvich! ’

‘I dare say! Much good I should do by making you more dismal than you are already! It’s bad for you. And, besides, I don’t know anything; I just said that without thinking.’

But I persisted, and he told me his ‘instance.’

‘A wounded officer, an artillerist, told me. They had just got out of Kishenev, in April, directly after the declaration of war. It rained incessantly, and the roads fairly disappeared; there was nothing left but mud so deep that the weapons and transoms sank in, right up to the axles of the wheels. It was so bad that the horses couldn’t manage; so they tied on ropes and set men to draw. On the second day’s march the road was fearful; twelve hills in eleven miles, and nothing but bog between. They got into a bog, and stuck there. It pelted cats and dogs—there wasn’t a dry thread left on them; they were hungry and thoroughly worn out, but the things *must* be dragged. Well, of course, a man would pull and pull, and then tumble face-downwards

into the mud in a fainting-fit. At last they got to such a slough that they couldn't move on a single step further, and still they kept on dragging themselves to pieces. "It's frightful even to remember what it was like!" said my officer. There was a young doctor with them, of the last batch—a nervous fellow—and he burst out crying. "I can't bear this sight," he said; "I'll go on in front." Well, off he rode. The soldiers cut a lot of branches, made almost a regular bridge over the swamp and, at last, got out of the hole. They tugged the battery up on to the hill, and there, behold, was the doctor hanging from a tree. . . . There's an instance for you. The man couldn't stand the *sight* of so much pain, so how do you suppose you can stand the pain itself? . . .

'Vasili Petróvich, don't you think it's easier to bear the pain oneself than to put an end to oneself like that doctor?'

'Well, I don't know that there's anything consoling in being harnessed to the shafts yourself.'

'At least your conscience will not torment you, Vasili Petróvich.'

'My good fellow, all that's too fine for me. You'd better talk about that with my sister; she's a big-wig on such hair-splitting as that. She can pull to pieces every little point in *Anna Karenina*, or discuss Dostoyëvsky, or

anything else you like; and no doubt this hobby of yours has been analysed in some novel or other. Good-bye, philosopher.'

He laughed good-humouredly at his own joke, and held out his hand to me.

'Where are you going ?'

'To the Wyborg Side,* to the hospital.'

I went into Kùzma's room. He was awake and feeling better than usual, as I was told by Mårya Petòvna, who, as usual, was sitting by the bedside. He had not seen me in uniform before, and the sight startled him unpleasantly.

'Will they leave you here, or forward you on to the army ?' he asked.

'They will forward me on. Did you not know ?'

He kept silence for a moment.

'I knew, but I forgot. I can't take in or remember many things, now. . . . Well, well . . . go. There's nothing for it.'

'And you, Kùzma Fòmich ?'

'What about "and I ?" Isn't it true ? What service have you done, that you should be let off ? Make haste and die. There are people more wanted than you—people that have worked better than you, and they go . . . Set my pillow straight . . . that's right.'

* A quarter of St Petersburg.

He spoke softly and irritably, as though trying to spite someone for his illness.

'All that is true, Kùzma, but am I not going? Am I protesting for myself personally? If so, I should have stayed here without further question—it would not have been difficult to arrange. I don't do that—I am wanted, and I go. But let me, at least, be permitted to have my opinion about the matter.'

Kùzma lay with his eyes fixed steadily on the ceiling, as though he did not hear me. At last he slowly turned his head to me.

'Don't you take what I say for anything serious,' he said. 'I'm worn out and irritable, and really I snap at people without knowing why. I've got as grumpy as a bear—I suppose it's time I died.'

'Nonsense, Kùzma, cheer up. The wound is purified now and healing up, and everything's going well. It's time to think of life, not death, now.'

Màrya Petròvna glanced at me with great sad eyes, and I suddenly remembered how she had said, a fortnight ago :—'No, we shall not pull him through—he will die.'

'Supposing I really were to come to life! It would be jolly,' said Kùzma, smiling faintly. You'll be sent off to fight, and Màrya Petròvna and I will come out, she as

sister of mercy, and I as doctor. Then, when you're wounded, I shall look after you, as you look after me now.'

'That will do, Kùzma Fòmich,' said Mårya Petòvna. 'It's bad for you to talk so much ; and besides, it's time to begin tormenting you.'

He submissively gave himself up into our hands. We undressed him, took off the bandages, and set to work upon the great lacerated chest. When I directed the stream of water on to the bare, bleeding wounds, on to the exposed collar-bone, which glistened like mother-of-pearl, the vein which ran across the whole great wound, clean and unattached, as though this were not a wound in the body of a living man, but an anatomical specimen, I thought of other wounds, far more terrible, both in their character and in their overwhelming number, and inflicted, moreover, not by blind senseless chance, but by the conscious act of men.

I do not write in this diary a word of what takes place, and what I have to go through, at home. My mother's tears, whenever she sees me, whenever I leave her, the strange gloomy silence at table when I am there, the tender considerateness towards me of my brothers and sisters—all this is hard to see

and hear, and still harder to write about. When I think that in a week I shall have to lose all that is dearest to me in the world, I am half-choked with unshed tears. . . .

The time for the parting has come at last. To-morrow morning, at daybreak, our party is to start by rail. I have permission to spend the last night at home, and now I sit alone in my room for the last time. The last time. Does anyone who has not suffered it understand the bitterness of those three words? For the last time we have separated for the night—for the last time I have come into this little room and sat down at this table lighted with the familiar lamp, and littered with books and paper. It is a whole month since I have touched them. For the last time I take up and look through the work I began. I had to break it off, and now it lies dead, abortive, senseless. Instead of finishing it, off you go with a thousand others like you to the world's end, because history has need of your physical powers. As for your mental powers, forget them; no one has any need of them. What does it matter that you have spent many years in training them, in preparing to make some use of them? An immense, unknown organism, of which you form a minute part, chooses to cut you

off and throw you away. And what can you do against its will, you—

‘Thou, the great toe’ . . .

There, there, that will do. I had better lie down and try to get to sleep; I have to get up very early to-morrow.

I asked that no one should come to the station with me. A deferred parting would mean only useless tears. But, when I was seated in the crowded railway carriage, I felt such a heart-crushing sense of loneliness—such an utter despondency that it seemed to me as though I would give up everything in the world for a few minutes with someone of my friends. At last the hour for starting arrived but the train did not move; for some reason there was a delay. Half-an-hour passed, an hour, an hour-and-a-half, and still it stood. In an hour-and-a-half I should have had time to go home for a bit. . . . Perhaps someone will come after all. . . . No, no, they all think the train has started before now; no one will count on its being late. Still it is possible. . . . And I sat looking in the direction from which they might come. I have never known the time drag so slowly.

The sharp sound of the horn, playing the roll-call, made me start. Those soldiers who had got out of the train and were standing in

crowds on the platform, hurriedly took their places. The train will start directly, and I shall see no one. . . .

But it was not so. The Lvovs, brother and sister, almost ran up to the carriage, and the sight of them was a real delight to me. I do not remember what I said to them ; I do not remember what they said to me, except one sentence—‘Kuzma is dead.’

With this sentence the notes in the pocket-book end.

A wide, snow-covered plain. White hills surround it, and on the hills are white, frosted trees. The sky is low and heavy ; there is thaw in the air. The rifles crack, the cannon-shots resound in quick succession ; smoke covers one of the hills and creeps slowly down into the plain. Through the smoke can be seen a black, moving mass. On looking fixedly one can see that it consists of separate black dots. Many of these dots are already motionless, but others keep moving on and on, although they are still far from their goal, which is visible only by the mass of smoke rising from it, and although their number grows less and less with every moment.

The reserve battalion, lying in the snow, each man holding his rifle in his hand (the

arms have not been piled), watches the movements of the black mass with all its thousand eyes.

‘There they go, lads, there they go! . . . Ah, they’ll never get there!’

‘And why ever do they want to keep us here? They’d manage it fast enough with a bit of help.’

‘Anybody’d think you were tired of your life,’ gloomily remarked an elderly ‘ticketed’ soldier. ‘Lie still, when you’re put here, and thank God that your skin’s whole.’

‘I shall be whole enough, daddy, never fear!’ answered the merry-faced young soldier. ‘I’ve been in four actions and got nothing. Just at first, while your strange to it, like, you feel queer; but afterwards, not a bit. Now, it’s our *barine*’s first action, so I doubt he’s repenting of his sins, eh? *Barine*, I say, *barine*!’

‘What?’ asked a rather thin soldier, with a black beard, who was lying beside him.

‘Cheer up, *barine*!’

‘I’m all right, my lad, thanks.’

‘You stick on to me if you get queer. I’ve been in already; I know about it. But our *barine*’s a plucky lad; he won’t turn tail. Before you, though, we had one of these volunteers, and when we got to the place, and the balls began to fly, he up and

pitched away his knapsack and his rifle, and cut and run, and a ball after him and took him in the back. That sort of thing won't do, 'cause, you see, there's our oath.'

'Don't be afraid, I sha'n't run,' answered the *barine*, softly ; 'there's no running away from a ball.'

'Course not ; how can you get away ? The ball's too quick for that. . . . Heart alive ! ours have stopped !'

The black mass had stopped moving, and poured out a smoky volley.

'Yes, they've begun firing ; they'll go back directly. . . . No, they're moving forwards ! Holy Mother of God, protect them ! . . . There ! There ! There again ! . . . Eh, look what a lot of wounded ! And they don't pick them up ! Good Lord ! . . .

'A ball ! A ball !' cried out several voices.

Something, indeed, whizzed in the air. It was a stray, chance shot, flying across the reserve. Another followed it, then a third. The battalion began to rouse up.

'A stretcher !' cried someone.

One of the stray shots had done its work. Four soldiers ran to the wounded man with a stretcher. Suddenly on one of the hills, in another direction from the place of the attack, there appeared small figures of men and horses, from which flew sharply out a

close, round mass of smoke, white as the snow.

'The scoundrel's aiming at us!' cried the merry soldier.

The grenade hissed and buzzed; a detonation resounded. . . . The merry soldier pressed his face into the snow. When he raised his head, he saw that the *barine* was lying beside him, face downwards, his arms stretched out, and his neck unnaturally bent round. Another stray shot had made a great black hole just over his right eye.



AN OCCURRENCE



AN OCCURRENCE.

I.

HOW it happened that I, who had not thought about anything for almost two years, began to think, I can't understand. It couldn't have been that gentleman, surely, that stirred up these thoughts in me, because one so often meets these gentlemen, and I've already got accustomed to their sermons.

Yes, almost all of them, except those that are quite accustomed, or the very clever ones, invariably get talking about these subjects; no use, either to them or to me. First, they ask what my name is, how old I am; then the greater number of them put on rather sad faces and began to talk about—'Can't you anyhow abandon such a way of life?' At first this catechising distressed me, but now I'm ac-

customed. One gets accustomed to many things.

But all this last fortnight, every time that I'm not gay—that is, not tipsy (for can I possibly be gay without being tipsy?), and when I am quite alone, I begin to think. I don't want to, but I can't help it; there's no getting rid of these gloomy thoughts; the only way to forget is to go to some place where there are a lot of people, where there is drunkenness and rollicking. I, too, begin to drink and rollick—one's thoughts get muddled, one forgets everything; then it's more bearable. Why wasn't that so before, from the very day that I flung over everything? I've lived here, in this wretched room, more than two years, spent all my time in the same way, frequented the same 'Eldorados' and 'Palais de Cristal,' and all this time, if I wasn't happy, at least I didn't think about being unhappy; but now, it's quite, quite different.

How tiresome, how stupid! It's all the same, I sha'n't change—sha'n't change, because I myself don't want to change. I'm inured to this life; I know my path. Why, in the *Dragonfly* (which one of my acquaintances often brings me, and always brings if there is anything 'piquant' in it), I saw

an illustration ; in the middle, a pretty little girl with a doll, and around, two rows of figures. Upwards from the child go—a little school-girl, then a modest young girl, a mother of a family, and, at last, a venerable old woman ; and on the other side, downwards, a shop-girl with a box, then—I, I, and I again. The first is I, as I am now ; the second, sweeping the crossing with a broom ; and the third—she is quite disgusting—a hideous old woman. Only I sha'n't let myself come to that. Two or three more years, if I can stand this life so long, and then the Ekaterinsky canal. I have courage enough for that ; I'm not afraid.

But how odd that artist is ! Why, after the school-girl, are bound to follow the modest maiden, the honourable mother and grandmother ? And I ? Thank heaven, I can still shine with French and German somewhere on the Nevsky ! And I think I haven't forgotten yet how to paint flowers, and I remember—*Calipo ne pouvait se consoler du départ d'Ulysse* ; and I remember Pushkin and Lermontov, and everything—everything ; and the examinations, and that fatal, terrible time when I was left, a helpless, silly girl, alone, with my kind relations who declared that they 'took in the orphan,' and

the passionate, villainous speeches of that fop, and how glad I was in my foolishness ; and all the lies and filth there in 'pure society,' from which I passed into this position in which I stupefy myself with gin. . . . Yes, now I have begun to drink even gin. '*Horreur!*' my cousin Olga Nikolaevna would cry.

And, indeed, isn't it *horreur*? But, in very truth, am I to blame? If, when I was a child of seventeen, that had lived cooped up within four walls, and seen no one but children like myself and a few mammas since I was eight years old, I had met, not my amiable friend with his hair *à la Capoule*, but some other man, some *honest* man ; then, no doubt, all would have been different. . . . What an absurd idea! As if there were any honest men ! Did I ever meet any, either before or after my catastrophe? Ought I to believe that honest people exist, when, of all the scores I know, there is not one that I could succeed in not hating? And can I believe it, when here come husbands from their young wives, and children (almost children, of fourteen and fifteen), of 'good families,' and bald, paralytic old men, with one foot in their graves ?

And then, can I help hating and despising them, although I myself am a despised and

despicable creature, when I see among them persons like a certain young German with a monogram tattooed on his arm just above the elbow. He explained to me himself that it was the name of his betrothed. 'Yetzt aber bist du meine Liebe, allerliebstes Liebchen,' he said, looking at me with his greasy eyes, and, moreover, repeated some verses of Heine. And even proudly explained to me that Heine was a great German poet, but that they, the Germans, had poets still greater, Goethe and Schiller, and that such poets could only be born of the great and gifted German nation.

How I longed to scratch his vile, fair, handsome, brutal face! But, instead of that, I only tossed off a glass of port wine that he gave me, and forgot everything.

Why should I think of my future, when I know so well what it will be? Why should I think of my past, when there is nothing in it for which I would exchange my present life? Yes, that's true. If it were offered me to-day, to go back there to the elegant surroundings, to the people with fashionably-parted hair and chignons, and fine words—I would not return. I would stay, and die at my post.

Yes, and I have a post. And I, too, am

necessary. I am needed. The other day there came to me a very talkative lad who repeated to me by heart a whole page from some book or other. 'That's our philosopher, our Russian philosopher,' he said. This philosopher said something very vague, and, for me, very complimentary ; something to the effect that we are the 'safety-valves for the public passions.' . . . The words are vile, and the philosopher, no doubt, is bad ; and worst of all was this boy, repeating these 'safety-valves.'

For that matter, the other day, the same idea came into my head. I was before the justice of the peace, who sentenced me to a fine of fifteen roubles for indecent behaviour in a public place.

Just at the moment when he pronounced the sentence, at which everyone stood up, it occurred to me—Why does all this public regard me with such contempt? Granted, I perform a filthy, disgusting business, fulfil the most contemptible of duties, but none the less it *is* a duty! This judge, too, fulfils a duty, and I think that we both . . .

I don't think anything ; I feel that I drink, that I remember nothing, that I am in a muddle. . . . Everything is mixed up together in my head ; that shameful hall where I shall dance immodestly this evening, and

the Litovsky Castle, and this shameful room that one can only live in when one is drunk. My temples throb, there is a singing in my ears, everything is darting about and whirling in my head, and I myself am whirling away somewhere. . . . I want to stop myself, to hold on to something—if it were only a straw—but I haven't so much as a straw.

That's a lie; I have! and not a straw, but maybe something stronger; but I myself have sunk so low that I don't choose to put out my hand to seize the stay held out to me.

It happened, I think, at the end of August. I remember it was a beautiful autumn evening. I was walking in the summer garden, and there made acquaintance with this 'stay.' There was nothing noticeable about this man, except, perhaps, a sort of good-natured talkativeness. He told me about nearly all his acquaintances and affairs. He was twenty-five, and his name was Ivan Ivanovich. He was neither handsome nor plain. He chatted with me just as with some acquaintance; even told me anecdotes about his superior official, and explained to me what was going to be done in the department where he serves.

He went away, and I forgot about him. But, a month afterwards, he turned up; and

turned up gloomy, thin, unhappy. When he came in I was quite startled at the tragic, unknown face.

‘You remember me?’

That moment I recognised him, and said so. He coloured.

‘I thought you wouldn’t remember, because, of course, so many—’

The conversation broke off. We sat on the sofa; I at one end, he at the other as if he had come to pay a visit for the first time; stiff, straight up—even holding his top-hat in his hands. We sat some time; at last he rose and bowed.

‘Good evening, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna,’ he said, with a sigh.

‘How do you know my name?’ I cried, firing up. My current name was not Nadyezhda Nikolaevna, but Evgenia.

I spoke to Ivan Ivanovich so fiercely that he was quite startled.

‘I didn’t mean any harm, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna; I won’t tell anyone. I know Piotr Vassilyevich, the police inspector, and he told me all about you. I wanted to say “Evgenia,” and said your real name by a slip of the tongue.’

‘But tell me why you came to me?’

He silently and sadly looked me in the face.

'What for?' I went on angrily. 'What interest can I possibly be to you? No; don't come to me any more. I don't want your acquaintance. I have no acquaintances. I know what you came for! This policeman's story interested you. You thought "here's a rare case; an educated girl fallen into such a life." You wanted to save me? Go away! I don't want your help! I'd rather be left to rot alone than—'

I glanced at his face and broke off. I saw that every word was as a blow to him. He did not speak, but his mere look silenced me.

'Good evening, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna,' he said. 'I am very sorry that I hurt you—and myself too. Good evening!'

He held out his hand to me (I couldn't help giving him mine), and went slowly out. I heard him go downstairs, and saw from the window how he crossed the court with bent head and slow, unsteady steps. At the gate he turned, looked up at my windows, and disappeared.

And this man might be my 'stay.' I have only to say a word to become a lawful wife, the lawful wife of a poor but honourable man, and even to become a poor but honourable mother, if the Lord in his wrath should send me a child.



I I.

TO-DAY Yevsey Yevséich said to me:—

‘Look here, Ivan Ivanovich. I’m an old man; listen to me. You’ve begun behaving in an unreasonable manner; take care you don’t get into hot-water at head-quarters, my good sir.’

He preached me a long sermon (beating about the bush and avoiding the main point) about the office, about respect for rank, about our general, about myself, and, at last, touched upon my trouble. We were sitting in a restaurant where Nadyezhda Nikolaevna often comes with her acquaintances.

Yevsey Yevséich noticed everything long ago, and wormed a lot of details out of me. I couldn’t hold my stupid tongue; blabbed everything to him, and almost burst out crying like a baby.

Yevsey Yevséich got quite angry.

‘Why, you milksop! You sentimental old woman! A young fellow like you—a steady business man—to get up all this fuss about a good-for-nothing creature like that! Why, the deuce take her! what business is she of yours? If it were some good, respectable girl; but this creature, saving your presence—’

Yevsey Yevséich even spat on the floor.

After that he often returned to the subject of his grievance (Yevsey Yevséich honestly takes it as a grievance), but did not use strong language any more, because he saw that it was unpleasant to me. For that matter he couldn’t restrain himself for long; and although at first he tried to speak evasively, he always ended with the same conclusion—that I ought to drop it; care killed the cat, and so on.

And I, too, feel, strictly speaking, the same thing that he repeats every day. How often have I, too, said to myself that I must drop it and hang care! Ah, how often! And just as often, after such thoughts, I have gone out of doors, and my feet have dragged me into that street. . . . And then she comes, with painted face and darkened eyebrows, in a velvet cloak and coquettish seal-skin hat, straight towards me; and I cross to the opposite side, so that she should

not notice that I follow her. She walks as far as the corner, and then turns back, proudly and insolently looking at the passers-by, and sometimes addressing them. I follow her from the other side of the street, trying not to lose sight of her slender figure, until some — scoundrel or other comes up and speaks to her. She answers him ; she turns round and goes with him . . . and I follow them. If the road were set with sharp nails it would not hurt me more. I walk on, hearing nothing and seeing nothing except two figures . . .

I look neither round me nor where I am going, and walk on, with wide-open eyes, knocking up against the passers-by, and getting remarks and abuse and pushes. Once I knocked down a child . . .

They turn to the right and left, and go in at the gate—first she, then he. From some strange sort of courtesy, he almost always makes way for her. Then I enter. Opposite the windows I know so well stands a shed with a hay-loft ; up to the loft leads a light iron ladder, ending in a landing without a balustrade. And I sit on the landing and look at the lowered white curtains . . .

To-day, too, I stood at my strange post, although there was a hard frost. I was

frightfully chilled ; my feet grew numb ; and still I stood. Steam came from my breath ; my moustache and beard were frozen ; my feet began to die away. There were some people in the yard, but they did not notice me, and went past, talking in loud voices. From the street resounded a drunken song (oh, this is a gay street !), and some quarrel or other, and the scraping of the spades on a path that the doorkeepers were cleaning. All these sounds rang in my ears, but I took no more notice of them than of the frost that stung my feet. All that—the noise and frost, and my own feet—seemed, somehow, far, far off. . . . My feet ached intolerably, but something within me ached still worse. I haven't the strength to go to her. Does she know that there is a man who would count it as happiness to sit in the room with her, and not so much as touch her hand, only look into her eyes ?—that there is a man who would throw himself into the fire, if that would help her to escape from this hell, and she desired to escape ? But she doesn't desire it, and to this day I don't know why she doesn't. For I can't believe that she is corrupted to the very core ; I can't believe that, because I know it is not so—because I know her—because I love her—love her . . .

The waiter came up to Ivan Ivanovich (who sat leaning his elbows on the table, and hiding his face on his arms, shuddering from time to time), and touched him on the shoulder.

'Mr Nikitin! We can't allow this, sir. . . . Before everyone. . . . My master will be angry. Mr Nikitin! You mustn't go on so here. Please to get up.'

Ivan Ivanovich raised his head and looked at the waiter. He was not drunk at all, and the waiter understood his mistake directly he saw the sad face.

'Nothing, Semeon—nothing. Just give me half a decanter of spirits?'

'Yes, sir. With what, sir?'

'With what? . . . With a wine-glass and, no; not half a decanter—a whole one. Stay, I'll pay for all now, and take two double-griven besides. In an hour you send me home in a cab. You know where I live?'

'Yes, sir. Only, sir—I don't understand—'

He was evidently puzzled; it was the first time in all the years of his restaurant experience that he had come across such a case.

'Stay, though, I'd better do it myself.'

Ivan Ivanovich put on his things in the passage, went out at the street door and

turned into the bar, in the low window of which glittered brightly in the gaslight the parti-coloured labels of the bottles, carefully and tastefully arranged on a bed of moss. A minute afterwards he came out, carrying two bottles, walked to his lodgings in the Chambers Garnies Zuckerberg, and locked his door.





III.

SAGAIN forgot everything, and again have come to my senses. Three weeks of daily street-walking; how on earth do I stand it? To-day my head aches, all my bones ache—everything aches. I am bored. I have the blue devils—useless, miserable thoughts. If only someone would come!

As if in reply to her thought the door-bell rang.

‘Is Evgenia at home?’

‘Yes, come in please,’ answered the servant’s voice.

Uneven, hasty steps along the corridor; then the door was flung open and Ivan Ivanovich appeared.

He did not in the least resemble the reserved and modest man who had come two months before. A hat cocked on one side, a coloured necktie, a bold, self-confident look; and, with that, a staggering walk and a strong smell of spirits.

Nadyezhda Nikolaevna started to her feet.

'Good-day,' he began ; I've come to you.'

And he sat down on a chair by the door, stretching out his feet, and without taking off his hat. She did not speak, neither did he. If he had not been drunk she would have found something to say ; but now she was thoroughly confused. While she was thinking what to do he began again.

'We—ell ! So here I am. . . . I have a right to come,' he suddenly cried out furiously, and stood up, drawing himself to his full height. His hat dropped off, the black hair fell in disorder over his face, his eyes flashed. His whole figure expressed such frenzy, that, for a moment, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna was terrified.

She tried coaxing.

'Listen, Ivan Ivanovich, I shall be very glad to have you come to me, only go home now. You have been drinking. Please go home. Come again when you are quite well.'

'Frightened !' Ivan Ivanovich muttered as if to himself, sitting down again. 'Tamed ! But why do you drive me away ?' he cried again desperately. 'Why ? You know it was on your account that I began to drink. I never was a drunkard. Why do you draw me to you ? Tell me ?'

He burst out crying. The drunken tears

choked him, streamed down his face, trickled into his mouth ; his lips were convulsed with sobs ; he could scarcely speak.

‘ Why, any other girl would be glad to have a chance of getting out of this hell. I would work like a horse—you would live safely, peacefully, honourably. Tell me, what have I done to deserve such hate from you ? ’

Nadyezhda Nikolaevna remained silent.

‘ Why don’t you answer ? ’ he cried. ‘ Speak, say what you like—only say something ! I’m drunk, that’s true. I shouldn’t have come here sober. Do you know how afraid I am of you when I’m in my right senses ? Why, you can twist me round your little finger. If you tell me to steal, I’ll steal ; if you tell me to murder, I’ll murder ! Do you know that ? Of course you do. You’re clever ; you see everything. If you don’t know—Nadya, my love, have mercy on me— ! ’

And he flung himself on his knees before her. But she stood silently with her head thrown back, resting against the wall, and her hands clasped behind her. Her eyes were fixed on some one point of space. Did she see or hear anything there ? What did she feel at the sight of this man, grovelling at her feet and imploring her love ? Pity ? Contempt ? She wanted to pity him, but

felt that she could not ; he roused in her nothing but disgust. And, indeed, what other feeling could he excite when in this pitiable condition—drunk, dirty, humbly entreating ?

He had left off going to business several days ago, and had got drunk every day. Finding consolation in drink, he had given up the pursuit of his passion and only sat at home and drank, collecting his strength to go to her and tell her '*all*' What he wanted to say to her he himself did not know. 'I will say all ; I will lay my heart bare,' passed vaguely through his tipsy head. At last he made up his mind, came and tried to speak. Even through the mist of intoxication he realised that he was saying and doing things not at all likely to awaken love for him, and yet he went on, feeling that with every word he was falling ever lower and lower, ever tightening the rope about his neck.

He spoke long and incoherently. His speech grew slower and slower, and, at last, the heavy, swollen eyelids closed, and, dropping his head over the back of the chair, he fell asleep.

Nadyezhda Nikolaevna stood in her former position, gazing aimlessly somewhere on the ceiling, and drumming her fingers on the wallpaper.

'Am I sorry for him ? No. What can I

do for him? Marry him? But dare I? And won't that be selling myself just the same? My God, no; that's still worse!'

She did not know why it would be worse, but felt it to be so.

'Now, at least, I am straightforward. Everyone has the right to strike me. Do I not suffer insults enough? But then!—In what way shall I be better? Won't it be just the same prostitution, only not so open? There he sits asleep; his head has fallen backwards, his mouth is open, his face is as pale as a corpse. His coat is all soiled; no doubt he's been wallowing somewhere. How heavily he breathes; sometimes even snores. . . . Yes, but all that will pass over, and he will be modest and decorous again. No, it's not that! But I think that this man, if I give him the upper hand over me now, will torment me with one recollection; and I couldn't endure that. No, I had better remain as I am; after all, it's not for long now.

She threw something over her shoulders, and went out of the room, slamming the door behind her. Ivan Ivanovich woke up at the noise, looked around him with vacant eyes, and, finding the chair uncomfortable to sleep on, staggered to the bed, tumbled down on it and slept like a top. He awoke late in the

evening with a headache, but sober ; and, seeing where he was, rushed away.

I left the house, not knowing myself where to go. The weather was bad, the day dark and gloomy ; wet snow fell on my face and hands. It would be much better to sit at home ; but can I sit there now ? He is going to utter perdition. What can I do to save him ? Can I alter my relation to him ? Oh ! all my heart, all my soul burns ! I don't know myself why I don't choose to catch at this chance to forsake this fearful life, to free myself from this nightmare. If I married him ? . . . New life, new hopes . . . Cannot this pity I feel for him ever pass into love ?

Ah, no ! now he is ready to lick my hand like a dog ; but then . . . then he will spurn me with his foot and say,—‘Ah ! and you resisted too ! Contemptible creature ! You despised me !’

Will he say that ? I think he will.

There is one last resource, one way of deliverance open to me, one sure way, that I resolved on long ago, and that I shall surely come to in the end ; but it is too early yet, I think. I am too young, there is too much life in me. I want to live ; I want to breathe, to feel, to hear, to see ; I want to be able to

look, once in a way, at the sky, at the Neva.

Here I am at the embankment. On one side huge buildings, on the other the blackening Neva. Soon the ice will break, the river will be blue again. The park on the other side is coming into leaf. The islands, too, are growing green. Although it is a Petersburg spring, still, it is spring.

And suddenly came up before me my last happy spring. I was then a child of seven years old, and lived with my father and mother in the country, in the steppes. I was very little looked after, and ran about wherever I liked. I remember how, after the thaw, rivers of water flowed and murmured in our steppe-ravines, how wonderful the air became, damp and delicious. First the tops of the hillocks grew bare, and the green grass appeared on them. Then all the steppe grew green, although the melting snow still lay in the ravines. In a few days, as quickly as if they had started from the earth ready-made, grew up peony-bushes, covered with gorgeous, brilliant, crimson flowers. The larks began to sing . . .

Oh God! what have I done that I deserve to be thrown into hell before I die? Isn't it worse than any hell,—what I endure? . . .

The stone staircase leads straight down to

a hole in the ice. Something dragged me down to look at the water. But isn't it too soon? Oh yes! too soon! I'll wait a bit longer.

And yet, how sweet it would be to stand on that slippery, wet edge of ice! Then I should just—slip down. Only it would be cold . . . one second, and then to go floating along the river under the ice; to dash one's hands and feet and head and face frantically against the ice. I wish I knew whether the daylight penetrates down there.

I stood beside the hole a long time without moving, and got, at last, into the condition in which one doesn't think about anything. My feet were wet, and still I did not move. The wind was not cold, but it pierced me through and through, so that I shivered from head to foot, and still I stood there. I don't know how long I should have continued in that petrified state, if some one had not shouted to me from the embankment.

'Hi there, miss! ma'am!'

I did not turn.

'Come on to the pavement please, ma'am!'

Someone began descending the staircase after me. Besides the scraping of feet on the sanded steps, I heard a kind of dull tapping. I turned round; a policeman was coming down; his sword rapped against the stones.

Seeing my face, he suddenly changed his official expression into a rough and insolent one, came up to me, and seized me by the shoulder.

‘Get along with you, you good-for-nothing trollop! Always dangling about everywhere! You’ll be throwing yourself under the ice next, or some such trick, and then we get into trouble for a rubbishy thing like you !’

He saw from my face what I am.





I V.

ALWAYS the same thing . . . I can't stop a minute alone without these black moods coming on. What shall I do with myself to forget?

Annushka has brought me a letter. Who is it from? It's so long since I got letters from anyone.

‘DEAR MADAM,—Although I clearly understand that I am nothing to you, nevertheless, I trust that you are a kind-hearted girl and would not willingly grieve me. For the first and last time in my life, I beg you to come and see me, as to-day is my name-day. I have no friends or relations to invite. I implore you to come. I give you my word of honour that I will say nothing unpleasant or offensive to you. Be merciful to your sincere well-wisher,

‘IVAN NIKITIN.

'P.S.—I cannot remember without shame my late behaviour in your lodgings. Come to me to-day at six o'clock. Address above.'

'I. N.'

What is the meaning of this? He has made up his mind to write to me. There's something not quite straight here. What does he want to do to me? Shall I go or not?

Strange to decide upon, to go or not. If he has laid a trap for me, it is either to kill me, or . . . but even if he kills me it will be a way out of the muddle.

I will go.

I will dress simply and modestly, and wash the paint and powder off my face. It will be more agreeable for him. I will do my hair simply. How thin my hair has grown! . . . I fastened it up, put on a black stuff dress, a little black scarf, and a white collar and cuffs, and went to look in the glass.

I almost burst out crying when I saw in it a woman not at all resembling the Evgenia who so 'charmingly' dances immodest dances in various low haunts. What I saw was not a shameless, painted courtesan, with smiling face and stylish head-dress, and darkened lashes. This pale, broken-down, unhappy woman, with great, mournful, black eyes,

heavily ringed with dark lines,—this is something new—not I at all— But, perhaps, this is—just I. And the other one, Evgenia, that everyone sees and knows—*that* is something foreign—taking possession of me— crushing me—killing me.

And I actually burst into tears, and wept long and bitterly. Tears are a relief—so I have always heard from my childhood,— but that is not true for everyone. My heart grew not lighter, but heavier. Every sob hurt me, every tear was bitter. To those who have still some hope of deliverance and grace, perhaps tears are a relief. But what hope have I?

I dried my tears and went.

I found Madame Zuckerberg's lodgings without difficulty, and the Finnish servant-maid showed me Ivan Ivanovich's door.

‘May I come in?’

In the room the lid of a trunk was hastily banged.

‘Come in,’ cried Ivan Ivanovich quickly.

I entered. He was sitting at a writing-table and gumming down an envelope. He did not even seem glad at my appearance.

Good-evening, Ivan Ivanovich,’ said I.

‘Good evening, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna,’ he answered, rising and holding out his hand.

Something tender crossed his face for a moment, when I gave him my hand, but instantly disappeared. He was grave—even stern.

‘Thank you for coming.’

‘Why did you ask me?’ said I.

‘Good heavens! don’t you know what it is to me to see you? But this conversation is unpleasant to you . . .’

We sat down in silence. The Finnish maid brought the *samovar*. Ivan Ivanovich handed me tea and sugar, then put on the table jam, cakes, confectionery, and half a bottle of sweet wine.

‘Excuse these preparations, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna. Perhaps they offend you, but don’t be angry. Be so kind as to make tea. Please take something—there are sweets and wine.’

While I made and poured out the tea, he sat opposite me, in such a position that his face remained in shadow, and looked at me steadily. I felt his fixed and earnest gaze upon me, and felt myself blush under it. I raised my eyes for an instant, but dropped them again at once, for he still continued gravely looking me straight in the face.—What is that for? Is it possible that these surroundings—the simple black dress, the absence of shameless faces and vulgar speeches, have affected me so strongly as to turn me

back into the modest, bashful girl I was two years ago? It annoyed me.

‘Tell me, please, why do you stare at me so?’ I said with an effort, but boldly.

Ivan Ivanovich started up and began pacing the room.

‘Nadyezhda Nikolaevna! Don’t speak so roughly! Be just one hour as you were when you came in!’

‘But I don’t understand why you invited me. Surely not merely in order to sit silent and look at me?’

‘Yes, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna, merely for that. You see, there is no particular offence to you in that, and to me it’s a consolation to look at you for the last time. You were so kind as to come; and in this dress, too, as you are now. I didn’t expect that, and am still more grateful to you for that.’

‘But why for the last time, Ivan Ivanovich?’

‘I’m going away.’

‘Where to?’

‘A long way, Nadyezhda Nikolaevna. It is not my name-day to-day. I just wrote that, —I don’t know why. I simply wanted to look at you once more. At first I wanted to go and wait till you come out, but then I somehow made up my mind to ask you to come here, and you were so kind as to come. God give you every happiness for that!’

‘There’s little happiness before me, Ivan Ivanovich.’

‘Yes, there’s little happiness before you. For that matter, of course, you yourself know better than I what is before you . . .’ Ivan Ivanovich’s voice quivered . . . ‘It’s better for me,’ he added, ‘because I am going away . . .’

And his voice quivered still more.

I felt an unutterable pity for him. Was I just to be so hard against him? Why did I repulse him so roughly, so bitterly? But now it was too late to regret.

I rose and began to put on my things. Ivan Ivanovich started up as if he had been stung.

‘You’re going?—Already?’ he asked in an agitated voice.

‘Yes, it’s time to go—’

‘Time to go . . . *There* again! Nadyezhda Nikolaevna! you’d better let me kill you at once!’

He said this in a whisper, grasping me by the arm and looking at me with great wild eyes.

‘It’ll be better?—Yes?’

‘But, you see, Ivan Ivanovich, you would be sent to Siberia, and I don’t want that on my account.’

‘To Siberia? . . . Do you think *that’s* why

I can't kill you—that I'm afraid of Siberia? That's not the reason . . . I can't kill you . . . Why, how can I kill you? . . . How can I kill you, my love?' he gasped, 'when . . . I . . .'

And he seized me, lifted me off my feet like a child, stifling me with embraces and covering my face and lips and eyes and hair with kisses. Then, just as suddenly as he had caught me up, he put me down again, and said hurriedly :—

'Well, go then, go! Forgive me; it's the first and last time. Don't be angry with me. Go, Nayezhda Nikolaevna! . . . Go, go! thank you for coming.'

He accompanied me to the door, and instantly locked himself in. I went downstairs. My heart ached worse than before.

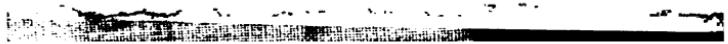
Let him go away and forget me, and leave me to live my life out. That's enough sentimentalising—time to go home.

I walked faster, and already began thinking what dress to wear and where to go this evening. So, there's the end of my romance—one little foothold on my slippery path. Now I can glide freely, without hindrance, lower and lower . . . 'BUT HE'S SHOOTING HIMSELF NOW,' something suddenly cried within me. I stopped, petrified. Everything grew dark before my eyes—my blood curdled

—I held my breath . . . Yes, he's killing himself now! He shut down the trunk; he'd been inspecting the revolver; he'd written a letter—‘the last time’ . . . I must rush! Perhaps I shall be in time. God! Stop him! Leave him to me, my God!

A deadly, unknown terror seized upon me. I tore back like a maniac, dashing against the passers-by. I don't remember how I ran upstairs. I remember only the stupid face of the servant who opened the door. I remember the long, dark corridor with the lodgers' doors. I remember how I flew to his door . . . And, as I seized the handle, a shot was fired off within. People came rushing out from everywhere, and they and the corridor, and the doors and the walls, whirled furiously round and round . . . And I fell—and in my brain, too, everything whirled round and disappeared.

THE END.

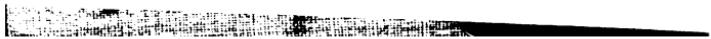


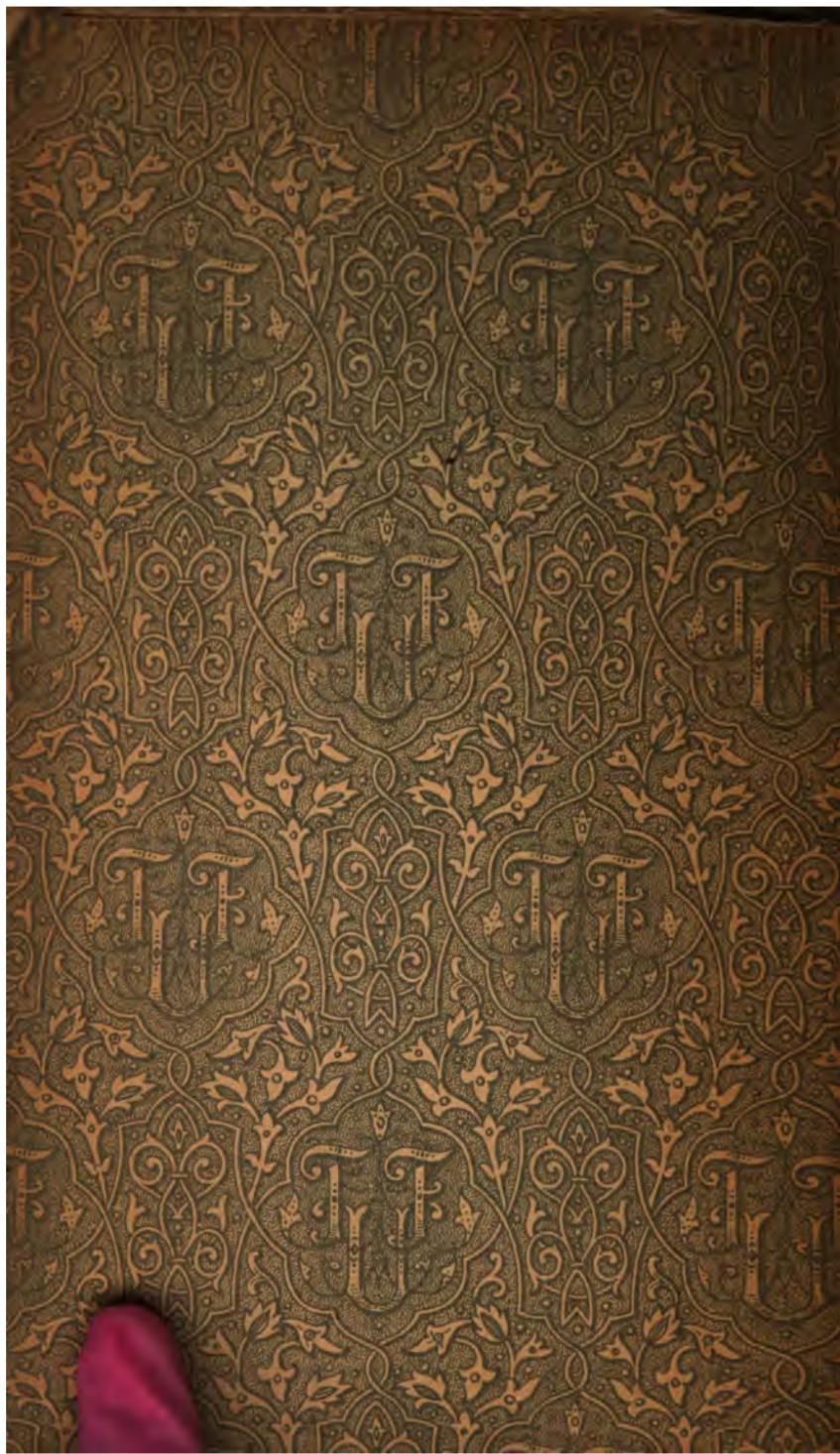
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